



IN  
THE PATH OF  
LA SALLE OR  
BOYSCOUTS ON  
THE MISSISSIPPI  
PERCY · K · FITZHUGH





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*See page 30.*

"HOLD ON TO THE CANOE!" HE HEARD SOMEONE CALL. "I — I  
CAN'T," HE SPLUTTERED. "HELP—HELP—I—"



IN THE  
PATH OF LA SALLE

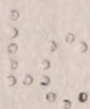
OR

BOY SCOUTS ON THE MISSISSIPPI

BY

PERCY K. FITZHUGH

*WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY H. FISK*



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TO THE SKIPPER OF THE "CHUM"







# BOY SCOUTS ON THE MISSISSIPPI

## CHAPTER I

WESLEY BINFORD

IF ever a man knew how to fill an ice cream cone, that man was Sparrow. He pressed the ice cream down into the very apex, packing it tight and hard; then building on this honest foundation he piled and crushed the cream in until it formed a luscious dome, like an arctic mountain, above the little conical cup. This he handed to you, dripping.

That is why the boys patronized Sparrow. It was easy enough to get ice cream cones, such as they were, down in Oakwood Village, but Sparrow, remote and obscure, far up beyond the second bend of the river, had served Gordon Lord one afternoon and Gordon had returned down the river to Oakwood and made Sparrow famous. Sparrow's flourishing trade was attributable to Master Gordon Lord; and this whole story comes out of an ice cream cone.

The front of Sparrow's odd little place was on



the village street of Bridgevale, its side toward the river where there was a float, a launching track and a little grove furnished with rickety tables and rustic chairs. These were for the boating parties, Sparrow's guests.

And Bridgevale? Oh, Bridgevale was a village which sponged on Oakwood and called frantically for Oakwood's fire department whenever it had a fire. But there weren't many fires. If there had been there wouldn't have been much Bridgevale, as Bridgevale's stock of fuel consisted of just nineteen houses. Brick Parks always claimed that you couldn't see Bridgevale without a field-glass, and one day the Oakwood boys, being in facetious mood, drove a stake in the ground along the river bank near Sparrow's, so they would know Bridgevale when they came to it. Of course, they did that to jolly Sparrow; but what did Sparrow care? He knew Brick Parks.

Time was when Sparrow looked to Bridgevale for his livelihood, but that was before he had discovered the vast possibilities of the ice cream cone and turned his calculating eye upon the gay river. Now parties coming from far down the stream and even from the bay would stop there for refreshment.

Sparrow's stock consisted of ice cream, to be served in plate or cone, root beer, cheese, crackers, spark plugs, cake, canoe paddles, pie, medium oil,



gum drops, batteries, chocolates and gasoline. You could regale yourself or your motor-boat at Sparrow's. You could, if you chose, leave your canoe there over night and go down to Oakwood by train if the weather were threatening, or if you were tired of paddling. An old rudder hung loose by its pintles from one of the tree-trunks, like an old tavern signboard, and on this was graven the legend, RIVERSIDE REST. But most of the patrons persisted in calling the place simply "Sparrow's."

The only things not of an edible or serviceable nature that Sparrow kept were picture post-cards. He had a rusty revolving rack filled with these, which creaked when you turned it so that the girls always pressed their elbows into their sides and drew long breaths between their clenched teeth, and shuddered. For this reason the boys always gave it a vigorous twirl when they passed it going to or from the float.

On a certain Saturday in early spring Wesley Binford stood on the Boat Club steps in Oakwood, watching the river. I remember it was a Saturday because it was the same day that the Oakwood scouts, both patrols, the Beavers and the Hawks, went into the city with Red Deer for their annual spring assault upon several sporting goods establishments. That was the very reason why Harry Arnold, leader in the Beavers, could not go canoe-



ing up the river with Marjorie Danforth. But that is another matter.

Wesley stood on the Boat Club steps, his hands in his pockets, contemplating the river. The pretty cupolaed boat-house with its pleasant veranda and easy-chairs was a tempting spot for summer lounging, and here the boys whose fathers were members of the Club were wont to loll away many an idle hour in vacation time. The boating had not yet begun; only one launch lay at the floats, but several others standing on blocks hard by were in process of renovation for the "Commodore's Run," which would formally open the season. Several canoes lay inverted on saw-horses about the lawn, their fresh paint drying in the sun. But the flower beds and gravel walks were yet unkempt, showing that whatever preparation the members might be making to launch their little craft, the Club had not officially pronounced the season open.

No boatman had as yet been engaged. The national emblem had not been raised on the cupola nor the Club pennant on the little shack where the boatman stayed. And everything was under lock and key.

Wesley wondered when they intended to hire a boatman, and whether he might — no, he couldn't; the very thought of it was humiliating. Yet there was nine dollars a week with very little to do except raise and lower the colors, trim the walks, keep



the lawn mowed and help the canoeists to and from the floats with their canoes. So far as the trimming and mowing were concerned, Wesley did as much at home; but he could not do such things for money.

Yet no boy that ever lived wanted money more than Wesley Binford.

He was a tall boy of about eighteen with a ruddy color, gray eyes, and a manner which people called likable. He was of all things manly in his look and demeanor, slim but healthful and muscular-looking, and with that indescribable something which suggests good instincts and good breeding. There was a little touch of superciliousness in his bearing, directed toward the world in general, particularly toward the unoffending, slow, beautiful, tree-embowered town of Oakwood, with the lovely river winding through it.

But supercilious or not, there was something particularly winning in Wesley's smile, and to supplement these favorable qualities of appearance, he was really generous and good-hearted. Small children liked him immensely (which I think is a good sign), and when he allowed himself to relax and be just the amiable, attractive, inexperienced boy that he was, everybody liked him and thought him charming.

But two things made Wesley dissatisfied and caused that little sneer which more and more of



late had disfigured his countenance. His parents were poor (not so very poor, but too poor for Wesley) and the restrictions which this fact placed upon his life irked him and made him cynical and covetous. Besides, he was dissatisfied with his youth. He wished to be a man and the pose of sophisticated worldly wisdom which he assumed deprived him, first and last, of a good deal of wholesome, boyish pleasure.

That is the reason why Wesley was not in the city with the scouts this beautiful Saturday instead of standing here alone on the Boat Club steps, wondering what to do with himself. He was on friendly enough terms with all the troop, particularly with Harry Arnold, but he said they were kids — nice kids, he admitted — but kids.

Oh, Wesley, Wesley, you make me laugh!

He cast a twig in the river and saw that the tide had not yet turned, it was still running up. He ambled along past the tiers of canoe lockers under the porch. Each was numbered and when he came to 53 he paused and tried the padlock, but it was fast. He gave a little amused sneer as if he did not care a bit, and wandered on.

But 53 was his unlucky number. In a few minutes he was before the locker again and this time he held a small stone. With this he tapped the bar of the padlock sideways very lightly and from a dexterous little twirl it presently fell open. Most



of the old Boat Club padlocks yielded readily to this cunning treatment and, first and last, they were subjected to it a great deal. For instance, there were the Lawton boys, three of them, and only one key; and that key had a perverse way of never being with any of them when it was wanted. Then besides, there was a kind of free-and-easy code at the Boat Club anyway. Everybody knew everybody else, there was mutual trust and good fellowship in the boating fraternity, and locks were "hypnotized" and canoes "borrowed" in a spirit of genial brigandage, much the same as a fellow's neckties and scarf-pins are "copped" and used by his chums at boarding-school.

I say this because I do not want to prejudice you against Wesley. There were, to be sure, some who never did this thing, and in this particular case it is right to tell you that Wesley's father was not a member of the Club. I should say that might make a difference.

In any event, he threw open the locker and grasped the end of the canoe, pulled it out over its rollers, hauled it to the nearest float and slid it into the river.

It was an unusually handsome canoe with the high, curving ends of the true Indian model, and painted a bright vermilion hue which contrasted pleasantly with the rich green of the new foliage as it glided silently upstream between the wooded,



overhanging shores. As Wesley passed under the rustic bridge there was the usual Saturday battalion of small boys perched upon its rail, their fish lines dangling in the water below. They made a row all the way along the bridge, the lines forming a sort of whip-lash curtain through which the canoeist must pass.

"Hey, look out for those lines, will you!" piped a diminutive urchin.

"Sure he will," reassured another; "he's a nice fellow; I know that red canoe."

Evidently the owner of the vermilion canoe was to be trusted.

Wesley cast a mischievous look at the group above, then with a dexterous sideways swing of his paddle he involved all the lines in a hopeless tangle. Emerging from beneath the bridge, he was greeted with a storm of appropriate epithets and, I am happy to say, with one or two well-directed missiles. One, a wriggling eel, caught him in the neck, but he cast it off good-humoredly and called, "Good shot!" at the elated marksman. There was a good deal of the true sport about Wesley.

"Why didn't you pull your lines up?" he demanded.

"A-a-a-w!" was the contemptuous reply. "You ain't the fellow that owns that canoe!"

"Don't get mad, now," laughed Wesley, dodging a missile. "Can't you take a joke? Climb



down here, kiddo, and I'll give you a dime to buy some more line."

"Ye-e-e-s, you won't!"

"Sure I will; climb down and hang onto that brace."

"Don't you go, he's kiddin' you!" advised one sage youngster.

But the little fellow clambered down, while Wesley fumbled in his pocket, the others crowding at the rail in sneering skepticism.

"Gee!" said Wesley, abashed; "I haven't got any change — honest. You be here when I come down."

"Ye-e-e-s," came a storm of distrust. "You think you can fool us, don't you, you big —"

But it was not quite so bad as that, for Wesley really did mean to pay for his little act of perversity. It was like him to tangle the lines simply because he had been asked not to. It was quite like him to wish to undo the little act of meanness directly it had been committed. It amuses me too to think how exactly like him it was not to have a dime in his pocket. And as for his promising to pay it on the way down when there was no means of getting it meanwhile, why, *that* was just Wesley Binford all over.



## CHAPTER II

### THE RIVER

IF the small boys had known how little the flying objects troubled Wesley, they would have ceased hurling them. What *did* trouble him and humiliate him was that his fine, sportsmanlike attempt at restitution had been such a ridiculous failure and left him contemptible in their eyes. That was where the shoe pinched. To be called fresh, even mean, that was not so bad, for such opinions could be very easily dissipated by the liberal distribution of small coin. And it was always Wesley's silly conceit to dance simply that he might pay the fiddler, like a generous, reckless, devil-may-care sport.

The last missile of the fusillade was a "shedder-crab," and it caught him in the neck and clung there, amid triumphant yells from the bridge.

"Go on, you cheap skate!" called a voice, derisively.

Wesley loosened the crab and cast it in the water. He was blushing scarlet, for this last epithet burned him like a hot iron. He had wanted to act a fine part,—free, liberal, open-handed, before these ad-



miring kids, and here he was paddling up the river with that unpleasant epithet of "cheap skate" ringing in his ears. If it had been Hallerton, or Carpenter, or Parks, or Arnold, they would have had money in their pockets, he told himself with a disagreeable little sneer, as he plunged his paddle in the water.

"Confound that thing!" he said, kicking an article of clothing which his foot encountered. "The bottom of this canoe's a regular rummage sale!" Then, noticing the dusty imprint which his foot left upon the garment, he reached forward and lifted it carefully.

It was a light brown mackinaw jacket, belted and plaited, of that sort which had lately come into vogue, and Wesley as he held it up, noticing its trim cut and vivid Indian figures, examined it not without a twinge of envy.

"Gee, but he's a lucky fellow," he mused; "he has everything that's going."

Whoever the "lucky fellow" was, Wesley liked him well enough to be careful of his property, and folding it properly he was about to lay it on one of the cushions when a jingling sound caught his attention, and a number of coins fell to the bottom of the canoe.

"Well, I'll be jiggered," he said, gathering them up with the aid of his paddle. This was not an easy task for the canoe rocked perilously from his



movements, but having satisfied himself that he had recovered them all, he replaced them in the pocket from which he thought they had fallen, buttoned down the flap so that they might not escape again, and resumed his paddling.

Beyond the first bend the river narrowed and the abrupt wooded shores formed a somber spot which the canoeists called "Twilight Turn" because it seemed always clothed in the half light of departing day. Here could usually be seen in the summertime some lonely fisherman, sitting in his anchored skiff, or sometimes a lolling canoeist (or more often, a pair of them) idling away a sultry afternoon in cushioned ease, and drifting hither and thither in their frail craft. It was felt to be an imposition that the fishermen should usurp this poetic spot, and as for their calling it "Perch Hole," there wasn't a girl in Oakwood who didn't shudder at the ugly appellation.

At present a cord was drawn taut across this shaded stretch, high enough for any canoeist to pass under by stooping, and a red rag dangled from its center to attract the eye of the voyager.

Wesley did not notice any lines depending from this horizontal cord, nor anything at the ends of it. He supposed that it was set for eels and that it was just another instance of the ruthless way the fishermen were wont to appropriate the river to their own pursuits, to the embarrassment of navigation.



“Well, that’s the limit!” he said, pausing angrily. “I’ll — be —”

Words could not express his indignation. All last summer had he and the rest of the boating fraternity watched with angry disapproval the huge dredge which had settled itself comfortably at Oakwood to clean out the river. He had seen the motor-boats monopolizing the channel. He had seen the fishermen in calm possession of the shadiest spots. And now here was a still more insolent violation of popular right.

“This is a public waterway,” he said, shaking his head, “and can’t be obstructed.” He had seen the phrases, “public waterway” and “cannot be obstructed” in a newspaper editorial which had questioned certain rights of the Water Supply Company, and he used them now because they seemed to have a legal, authoritative sound. These encroachments were coming to be beyond endurance. The river was made to canoe on. The beautiful stream winding between its wooded shores was for his enjoyment and that of other canoeists. He was very certain of that.

So, instead of passing under the cord, he wrenched it loose from both shores and cast it in the water. It was just at that moment that he noticed on the farther shore a pole planted in the ground, from which flew a small blue flag. In its center was a circle of thirteen stars and inside this



a triangle with two hammers crossing its face. The design was white. A little way back in the woods Wesley caught a glimpse of what he thought to be a tent, almost entirely concealed by the foliage. Half way down the flag-pole was a printed sign which, if he had not been so consumed with righteous indignation, he might have seen before. It read:

This line is the property of the United States Government. All persons are warned not to remove or interfere with it in any way. Launches will stop 30 feet from line and signal to attendant if line will not permit them to pass.

Wesley did not pause to take issue with any one. On the contrary he paddled just as rapidly and just as quietly as he could up the much-misused "public waterway" until, beyond the second bend, he reached the little wayside rest of Sparrow. Here the champion who would not allow the public waterway to be obstructed was presently to encounter a third obstacle to his pleasure and peace of mind. This was a slender girl of about fifteen, who was leaning against one of the rustic tables and calmly watching him as he brought up alongside the float. To Wesley her quiet observation was very disconcerting. He had an odd feeling that he might not be altogether welcome. But he was a sensitive boy and I dare say this was just his imagination.



"Hello, Honor," he said, cheerily. "I haven't seen you since last fall."

"Do you want to see father?" she asked.

"Why — er, yes — I — that is — I just paddled up to sort of start the season, you know. *Somebody's* got to start it. They'd never wake up down in Oakwood unless somebody started things. It's a case of 'Let me dream again.' Most of them don't know the skating's over yet, and they won't know the boating's started till the skating begins again. They're dead down there and they don't know it."

"So?" said the girl; "how odd!"



## CHAPTER III

### THE STRANGERS

SPARROW came out of the little shack into the grove, greeting the boy cordially. It was hard to say how old Sparrow was, but he was not young. His face was shaven and deeply wrinkled and his hair was thick and curly and of an iron-gray hue. His eyes were blue and as simple and honest as those of a little child.

It was an open secret that Sparrow had failed in the world. The great city had been too much for him and he had come up here with all he had, his young daughter and his small savings, and bought this little place which now furnished his living and constituted his home. He had the reward which most men have who fail because they lack shrewdness; he was trusted and liked. Every one had a feeling of affection for him, and the very qualities which had made him a failure in a large way had brought about his present modest prosperity in this small field.

It was very easy to "jolly" Sparrow, and he would readily swallow the most atrocious yarns.



He always gave overweight in candy, crackers and such things. He hadn't been to the city for ten years and the Oakwood boys hoped he never would go there, for they used to tell him the most outlandish things about the city. He didn't believe their tales but he always laughed amiably and was glad to see the boys enjoying themselves at his expense. When Sparrow was sick Dr. Brent used to run up from Oakwood in his car each day to see him and was quite insulted when Sparrow asked for his bill. When he was getting better the Oakwood boys "chipped in" and gave him an easy-chair. On the whole, I am inclined to think that Sparrow was a great success.

"H'lo, Charlie," said Wesley, "how are things?"

"Beginning to seem like spring, isn't it?" Sparrow drawled. "How's Oakwood?"

"Oh," said Wesley, "I wouldn't speak disrespectfully of the dead."

Sparrow laughed good-humoredly, and Wesley was encouraged.

"Why, even the tide turns around and goes back when it gets to Oakwood," said he.

"That's very witty," said the girl, "but it isn't quite true; and that other one about speaking disrespectfully of the dead — didn't you say that last year?"

Wesley was disconcerted; he wished she would go away.



"I think," he said, "that a large and juicy cone would be about right now; got any chocolate, Charlie?"

The girl brought the cone and stood waiting by the table where her father and Wesley were seated. Sparrow saw that Wesley was uncomfortable and nodded to his daughter, who went away.

"I'll fix that up next week, Charlie."

"That's all right, Wesley; I don't want you to feel that you can't stop here unless you have money with you."

"You're all right, Charlie," said Wesley, approvingly. "I guess you'll never lose anything by me."

Sparrow laughed at the very thought.

"Who's camping down the line, Charlie? There's a tent down at the bend."

"Oh, those are the surveyor folks; I guess they're about done now," Sparrow drawled.

"What — what are they surveying?"

Sparrow smiled. "Why, Wesley, where have you been keeping yourself?"

"Maybe he's dead and doesn't know it," said the girl, who had returned to rub off the table.

Wesley was nettled. He could not talk easily while she was near so he just drummed on the table until she went away again. When she was a yard or so distant she wheeled about with unconscious grace and asked if he wanted anything more.

"You want another cone, Wesley?" said Sparrow.



“N-no, I guess not; tell me about this bunch, will you? They seem to have an idea they own the river.”

“Oh, I guess not,” Sparrow laughed, softly. “They seem to be a first-rate set. I believe I’ll miss them when they’re gone. ’Long about now you know, Wesley, I usually begin to get anxious to see the canoes come along. I kind of hanker after spring — and I’m glad you paddled up, Wesley — it’s good to see you. I suppose the other boys will be coming up in a day or so. Well, now, these surveyor folks have been real good company to me. Captain Craig, he’d come and set right down where you are and chat, and you wouldn’t believe it, Wesley, the adventures that man has had.

“One of those boys — the one they call Bob — I never heard tell of such things as he’s been through! Had a fight with a grizzly — sounds just like a dime novel, Wesley, so it does. And he went across from one mountain peak to another on a rope — rode in a little wicker basket to — to — er — verify a contour.”

“To how?”

“I can’t tell you what that means, Wesley,” laughed Sparrow. “I don’t like to interrupt them much to ask. Honor and I, we just sit and listen.”

“Swallow it whole, hey? Does she believe their stories?”

“Why, they rooted out a band of train-robbers



in Kentucky, Wesley, the day before they sent the Mammoth Cave in by parcel post, and —" here Sparrow broke down in innocent laughter.

Wesley waited with cynical amusement, pitying his host's credulity. "I suppose they've killed a few giants and dragons, too," he suggested.

"Oh, they just meant mailing the map in, I suppose," Sparrow explained; "but I do declare it's good to hear them talk —'specially the captain. Honor and I'll both hate to see them go and that's a fact. We had quite a little joke, Wesley, she and I; when their launch would go chugging by she'd run down to the float and shout through the megaphone for the captain to come over and talk to father, and I'd make believe it was she all the while that wanted to hear about the adventures. She's great for adventures — I never *saw* such a girl!"

"Guess that's why she likes Harry Arnold."

"Well, that's a fact, Wesley; Harry *has* been about some, and that two years he spent in Panama, it's just made a man of him. It's a great thing for a boy to get away and be thrown on his own —"

"Well, how about this outfit?" Wesley interrupted. "Who are they, anyhow?"

"Why, they come from Washington, Wesley, from the Department of Geological and Coast Survey. They've been mapping up the river. You never heard such yarns as they have to tell. I



could just sit and listen to them all night. They lined up the Everglades down in Florida — that's what they call it, 'lining up.' And they packed up the Grand Cañon of Arizona for shipment — Wesley, you'd just laugh yourself hoarse to hear the way those boys go on. Sometimes I don't know what they mean when they get to talking shop; you'd think the mountains and valleys and great lakes were just bric-à-brac."

"It's easy to entertain you, Charlie," smiled Wesley as if to humor Sparrow's simplicity. "I guess they've been stringing you."

"Wesley, do you know who they call the 'Old Lady'?" Sparrow chuckled.

"No, who?"

"The Mississippi River! I used to hear them talking about the 'Old Lady,' and finally I asked them. They never call it anything but just the 'Old Lady.'"

There was a moment of silence during which Sparrow seemed to hesitate as if not knowing whether to say what was in his mind or not.

"Do you know, Wesley, I should think you'd like a position such as those boys have; you're tall and strong and tough, and you'd get right in touch with nature. I believe if I were a boy I couldn't resist it."

"Not for mine!" said Wesley. "I'm not going to spend *my* life in a pair of overalls."



"You'd get right out in the far west, and it would be —"

"It would be a plaguy long ways from Broadway," Wesley interrupted.

"In the old days," mused Sparrow, "when a boy felt he just *had* to have adventures, he up and ran away from home, but now, I do declare, it seems as if Uncle Sam was just waiting to supply them.— You're going to work in the fall, aren't you, Wesley?"

"Oh, if anybody offered me a position as president of a bank right now I'd take it. Otherwise I'm on the line September first for my little commutation ticket."

"Just back and forth to the city every day, eh?" Sparrow queried.

"Sure. All this talk about 'back to nature' makes me tired. It seems as if these days all you have to do is to turn day-laborer to amount to something. The way it used to be, a fellow'd leave the farm and go to the city to make something of himself. But now they tell the city fellow to get back to the farm if he wants to succeed."

Sparrow laughed appreciatively. He had quite a regard for Wesley's worldly wisdom.

"Not for mine," Wesley went on. "Why, I can get into an insurance company easy enough and they close at four in the afternoon. And the banks are better still. Look at Billy Ackerson, he gets



twenty plunks a week in the Forbes Perfumery Company and Saturday afternoons all the year round."

Sparrow smiled. "Do you believe you could get up much enthusiasm for perfumery, Wesley? Really, now? All it's good for is to sprinkle on your handkerchief. Is the world any better for it?"

"Billy Ackerson is better for it."

"Ha, ha! You've always got an answer ready, Wesley.—But the work these fellows here are doing—it's a great work. You take a man who has his dealings with mountains and valleys and prairies and great rivers—he gets kind of calm and serene like, Wesley. And he measures up. Why, when I told Captain Craig I intended to drive piles for a boat-house over yonder, what do you think he did? He just picked up a rock, looked at it and told me, No, that there was nothing but mud underneath that kind of rock; why, he can tell you the different kinds of soil for fifty yards down—it's just wonderful! You've no idea, Wesley, how many people—railroad men, mining men, construction engineers, and people like that—depend on the information they get from the Survey Department. But," he added, chuckling with boyish simplicity, "I just can't get over their calling the Mississippi River the 'Old Lady.'"

Wesley laughed too at the impression which this



band of official wanderers had made upon Sparrow's credulous mind.

"Well, there'll be company enough pretty soon now, Charlie, I guess," he said, rising. "Don't let the captain string you."

"Come up soon again, Wesley. I see you've a new canoe."

There was a little rueful look, half smile, half sneer, on the boy's face as he sauntered toward the float. "He's easy, all right! Huh, *I'd* like to meet that bunch," he mused. "They'd have a good run for their money trying to string *me!* *I'd* have them guessing. I'd have little old Captain What's-his-name eating out of my hand. It would be my deal when it came to fairy-tales, believe *me!*"

At the float he encountered Honor again.

"Well, I hear you've been having story-telling hour up here, Honor; I'd like to meet that outfit."

"I hope you wouldn't hurt them," said she, quietly.

"They'd have to give me ether to get those adventure stories down *my* throat."

"Wouldn't that be too silly!" said the girl.

They stood facing each other for a moment, Wesley feeling uneasy as he always did in her presence, and the girl apparently hesitating whether to speak or not.

"Wesley Binford," she said at last, trying to overcome a tremor in her voice, "there was three



dollars you forgot to pay father last fall before the season closed; a dollar and a half for canoe hire and the rest for other things. *He'll* never remind you about it so I have to. We had a hard time getting through the winter up here and — and — it can't be you've forgotten it — have you? I didn't hear you say anything about it to father, so I felt that I must — must — ask you about it."

She could say no more and she waited, blushing and uncomfortable.

It was just because he felt that Honor Sparrow had a certain contempt for his fine show of manliness and worldly experience that Wesley felt he must now, at any cost, show her that her opinion of him was prejudiced and unfair. He remembered the three dollars well, and I hope I need not tell you that it was his intention to pay it. For just a moment he moved nervously from one foot to the other and felt hot and uncomfortable around his collar. He would not give this girl the satisfaction of sneering at him. The incident down at the bridge, with its unpleasant epithet, still chafed him. He could not bear the gaze of her steadfast, questioning eyes. He would show her that she was mistaken and —

And then Wesley Binford made the mistake of his life.

"Oh, that's so," he said, as if with sudden recollection. "Glad you mentioned it, Honor — and I owe another nickel now, too; I'd leave my head



lying in that canoe if it wasn't fastened on," he added, starting toward the boat.

From the flap pocket of the mackinaw he brought forth several bills and some small change.

"I'm awfully glad you mentioned it, Honor; why, do you know, that really was what I came up for! All winter, and a measly little three dollars! Here," and he handed her two bills and a nickel.

This latter she glanced at, then examined more closely, and handed back. His manner and his unexpected act took her quite by surprise, and she seemed more kindly disposed toward him as she said,

"I guess you didn't mean to give me this one, Wesley; it says *Republica de Panama* on it."

The boy felt himself blushing and he gulped nervously as he took the coin.

"Sure enough," said he; "that's my — my — old reliable pocket-piece." And he handed her another coin in its stead.

"Good-by, Honor."

"Good-by," she said, watching him, just a trifle puzzled at his manner.

Wesley got into the canoe with a fine air of nonchalance. But the paddle was not steady in his hand. He ran the canoe clumsily into a skiff near by, extricated himself with an exclamation of annoyance, and started to paddle down the river on the ebbing tide. He was very nervous and agitated.



## CHAPTER IV

### WESLEY BINFORD HAS HIS WISH

YET there was nothing, he reflected, to be nervous and agitated about. And he was quite impatient with himself that he should give way to this strange uneasiness over nothing. So with a fine air of unconcern, he plunged his paddle vigorously, as if to have done with all such nonsense. Of course, he told himself, it wasn't as if he intended to — he didn't finish the sentence, the thought was so absurd. If he had allowed himself to finish, he would have found himself using a word he did not like, and which — which had no connection with him at all. Wesley never liked to confront things, or even thoughts, that were troublesome and unpleasant.

*He* was not in any trouble, he assured himself. His course was perfectly plain. In two hours everything would be all right, and then — then he would never again let a snip of a girl cause him to do anything that was — foolish. That was just the word — foolish. He would be in Oakwood by two o'clock. After he had put the canoe in locker



53 he would go home, get his bicycle, and ride it up to Billy Ackerson's. Billy was going to buy the bicycle this very day. He had said he would have the money on Saturday, and he always came out on the 3:10 train. The scouts wouldn't be home till the 5:10 train.

You see how nicely everything was going to come together.

Again he roused himself and gave his little, sneering chuckle.

"Huh, *I'd* like to meet them," he mused, thinking of his talk with Sparrow. "I know that cowboy brand, all right. They've got Charlie hypnotized, that's one sure thing. If they handed *me* any of those Hans Christian Andersen wonders, it would be a case of 'ring off, you've got the wrong number, boy,' believe *me!*"

He had just rounded the upper bend into the quiet shade of "Perch Hole" where the pungent odor of damp wood and rotting foliage seemed to emphasize the solitude. On one side the trees crowded down to the water's edge and here and there among them stood dead trunks, white and conspicuous. On the other shore the trees were more sparse, and through them one could see, beyond the fields, the state road running along its high embankment.

Wesley paused, letting the water drip from his paddle and listening to it idly. Then a faint chug-



ging caught his ear and he listened intently. About him all was very still; there were no other loiterers. Now the chugging seemed near, now far, now died altogether, and then he heard it again, confused with its own echoes. The river was so winding that an approaching boat might be very near and yet have to pass away again following the bend of the stream. Of a sudden Wesley espied a motorcycle speeding along the distant road and decided that from this came the sound he had heard.

"If I had two hundred dollars," he mused, "I'd —"

But suddenly the long cry of a siren sounded close upon him, he heard voices which seemed strangely clear, and he paddled furiously out of the channel to escape a good-sized launch which came darting around the bend. As it passed, his quick glance caught only a suggestion of white hull, a large highly-polished brass searchlight and a Rough Rider hat.

He was nearing the wooded shore when he felt a quick jar, there was a sound of scraping, then of ripping, the canoe jerked, heeled over, and Wesley was aware of the water pouring through a great jagged rent in its frail side. It had been simply torn open, several of its ribs wrenched out of place and a big, gnarled, slimy piece of wood with a great spike in its end was projecting through the side. Then, all in an instant, the boat filled and



Wesley was floundering in the water. All that was visible of the craft was its mahogany gunwale which became instantly submerged as he grasped it. His feet groped frantically and finding no foothold, he became panicky. Again and again he grasped the rail of the canoe, only to go down with it as it rolled over. Once his foot rested on some slimy object, but slid off. In terror he tried to grasp the high curving end of the ruined craft, but it gave gently, and he went down, down, then presently rose again sputtering and shrieking desperately.

“Hold on to the canoe!” he heard some one call.

“I — I — can’t,” he spluttered. “Help — help — I’m —”

“Hold on to the canoe, and keep your mouth shut!” the voice insisted. “I’m not going to bend my shaft in all that trash!”

“I — I — it goes under,” Wesley yelled. “I’m —”

“What of it?” said the voice, sternly. “Hold on and keep your mouth shut, and don’t be a baby!”

He held fast and felt himself dragged briskly through the water. The next thing he realized he was pulled, shivering and sputtering, into a launch where a young fellow was unlashng a boat-hook from the end of a long rod with a scale printed on it.



“Hold her there a minute, Bobby,” said a man. “Huh,” he added as he examined the submerged canoe, “torn like a paper bag. ’Fraid she’s done for. Good frame, too. She’ll lodge in those bushes over there and you can get her — she won’t sink. What’d you want to run in there for?”

It seemed to Wesley that a fellow who had been all but drowned should have a little more sympathy and attention. But, on the contrary, this man showed not the least symptom of excitement. He was distressingly calm and matter-of-fact. And Wesley had a misgiving that the man was not altogether favorably impressed with him.

“How did I know what was in there?” he answered, petulantly. “I’m not a mind reader.”

“You saw there were dead trees and part of an old float on shore, didn’t you? You might have known that where there are dead trees on shore, there are dead ones under the water. Where were your eyes? What’s the matter, can’t you swim?”

“N-not for — I haven’t swam for —”

“You never forget how to swim,” the man interrupted crisply. “Guess you never learned, eh?”

He did not seem at all annoyed at Wesley’s weak attempt to deceive him. But he clipped the deception off as one clips a wire with a pair of nippers.

Wesley was about to make a sarcastic reply, but the clear brown eyes that were looking straight at him abashed him and he refrained. He was not going to let the man off too easily, however.



"I suppose that's what you call deduction," he said, with as much of a sneer as he dared display.

"What?"

"That about the trees."

"No, that's just plain horse sense," said the man quietly. "You cold?" he added, seeing Wesley shiver.

"I'm getting pneumonia by the minute, believe *me*."

"Oh, no, you're not; take off your shoes; you don't get cold as long as your feet are bare. Take off your coat, too, the sun'll dry you out.—Pull that clutch over, will you, Bobby? And you take the wheel, Mack."

The launch started downstream, the man, apparently oblivious of Wesley's presence, busying himself with the engine. He turned one of the grease cups, then another, filled the oil cup, adjusted it, watched it a minute, turned the cock in the muffler to see if she was pumping, oiled the pump eccentric, and then stood, watching her and listening in a knowing, inquisitive way to the explosions.

"Little more gas?" he queried of the young man who was steering.

"No, I don't think so," said Mack; "better turn off that cup, hadn't you?" he added, looking back along the outside of the boat. "She's smoking like blazes."

"Guess you're right," said the man.



He shut off the oil cup and still stood watching the mechanism.

The young fellow called Bobby perched himself on the after-deck and began to play a harmonica. Mack, at the wheel, kept his gaze ahead. The unexpected guest could not help feeling that he was not at all the hero of the occasion. Not only was he denied the sympathetic attention that he felt he was entitled to, but no one seemed disposed to notice him at all.

So he fell into a kind of sullen observation of his rescuers. The man, who was stocky in build, wore a khaki suit and a Rough Rider hat with the brim turned up in front, and a lead pencil stuck in its cord. He was perhaps thirty-five years old, his face was tanned almost to the hue of a mulatto and he had a short mustache, black as ebony. Through his rimless glasses looked a pair of calm, clear, brown eyes which, somehow, were very disconcerting to Wesley, and he had a way of speaking in a crisp, clear-cut manner and listening for an answer as if he expected it to be prompt, concise and explicit. He seemed agreeable enough but this cheerful definiteness and alertness in his manner confounded any attempt at deception. Wesley felt that if he were going to say anything he had best think it out beforehand and get it just right.

The two young men, who were dressed in khaki trousers and flannel shirts, did not seem to stand



at all in awe of the man and, though always respectful, laughed at him uproariously at times, particularly Bobby who positively declined to accept any of his opinions regarding the management of the engine. There was a tent stowed aboard, two or three duffel bags, a surveyor's transit, rods, chain and various odds and ends incidental to roughing it and camp life. They seemed to Wesley a care-free, happy trio, making game of each other's foibles, the man being a sort of incongruous combination of a scholar, a scientist and a tramp.

After a few minutes the man sat down beside Wesley.

"Trouble with these 'make-and-break' engines is your contact points wear out without your knowing it," he said. Wesley stared. The man removed his glasses carefully with the thumb and finger of each hand, held them up to the light and replaced them accurately on his nose. Then he nodded amusedly toward Bob and winked at Wesley.

"Terrible, isn't it?" he said, referring to the harmonica. "We'd get rid of him if it wasn't for Civil Service."

"Who'd cook your supper for you then?" queried Bobby, "and your surpassing coffee?"

"Well, we're going to break up and board a while, anyway," said Mack, at the wheel.

"Well, we get pretty good 'eats' on the R.S.,"



answered Bobby, removing his harmonica to speak.

"Look at the appropriations they get," said Mack; "even Bull Hungerford was satisfied."

"Was he with them?"

"Sure — he went all the way down the Colorado with them last summer — he and Rinkey Brown; they were using Dill pickles for plumb-bobs."

"Do tell!" said Bobby.

"And bags of oatmeal for a bankhead revetment down the Columbia. They used a sack of dried apricots in a levee leak — it swelled right up and filled the hole fine. — They have a regular cook in the R.S."

"That is, a *real* cook, a *good* one," observed the man, winking at Wesley again.

"They lined up the whole north quadrangle of the Yellowstone with strings of spaghetti," continued Mack. "Oh, they live high in the R.S.!"

"But no music," said the man, slyly.

"No, thank goodness for that!" said Mack. "When are we going to get started, Captain?"

"Monday night."

"We going to stop off at Washington, Captain?" asked Bobby, with affected innocence. Mack looked around, laughing.

"We are *not*," said the Captain, crisply.

"Oh, we'd better stop in Washington, hadn't we?" Bobby persisted, with a twinkle in his eye.

"We wouldn't be delayed more than a month or so," said Mack.



“Just till Senator Flumdum gets over his attack of the pip.”

“It would be *such fun* sitting around waiting for Secretary —”

“We will make a long detour around Washington,” said the Captain.

Wesley could not help laughing in spite of himself. He was in no mood for laughter, to be sure, and when he thought of his return to Oakwood he was, as he might well have been, nervous and troubled. For a few minutes he had almost forgotten his trouble in listening to the banter of this apparently happy-go-lucky band. He knew well enough who they were, but he had lost all desire to “take them down” now. He wished that he had as little to worry his mind as they had. And even had he felt disposed to match himself against them, the captain, he felt, would prove more than his equal and simply make him ridiculous. All his fine bravado was gone now, and instead he confronted his shameful home-coming. What should he say about the canoe? And where was the mackinaw jacket? In the canoe, no doubt, and securely buttoned into its flap pocket was just three dollars and five cents less than should be there. Of course, it would be found and everything would be discovered. No doubt, Honor Sparrow would mention that he had handed her a Panamanian coin. He had not thought of that before.



"I'm in bad," he said to himself; "I don't know what in thunder to do now!"

He was surprised and angry that an act in which his intentions were perfectly honorable should leave him in such a predicament. Besides (though this seemed but a trifling matter now), he had an uncomfortable feeling of being inferior to these fellows in the launch. They knew that he could not swim, he felt that they attributed his accident to ignorance or bad judgment, and he had not been able to offer so much as a comment when the man had made a casual remark about a well-known feature of a common, everyday gas engine. How readily Arnold would have fallen into discussion of such a thing. The captain had seemed to assume that he would know something about gas engines.

Yet, uncomfortable as he was, he wished that the launch would go slower. He did not want to reach Oakwood till he had time to think. He wished now that he had tried to rescue the tell-tale jacket. Suddenly the shrill whistle of a distant train caught his ear and he fancied that the scouts might be coming home before he had a chance to —

To what? He had no plan now.

He listened abstractedly to the bantering shop-talk of his companions. Mack, at the wheel, was singing, and Wesley envied him that he felt in the mood to sing.



“Little bits of red tape,  
Little drops of ink,  
Knock our work all endways —  
Put it on the blink.”

“I should think you’d like to go to Washington,” Wesley said after a while, feeling that he ought to say something.

“So we do,” said Bob. “We just *love* it; it’s as good as a three-ring circus. Did you hear about that congressman saying he’d never heard of white coal?” he added, calling to Mack; “wanted to see a piece.”

This produced great laughter.

“What is white coal?” Wesley ventured.

“Just water,” said the Captain.

“There’s a way to get past Washington,” said Mack.

“I’ve never heard of it,” said the Captain in his crisp, choppy way.

“In an aëroplane.”

“I don’t believe there’s any call for rush anyway, Captain,” said Mack. “It’s probably just like it was last year in Arizona. Soon as the wild water starts they go up in the air and have to have a storage survey. They can’t do anything now; they’ll just have to leave it to the levees. If it lights in below Cairo, it’ll be all right.”

“Well, we’ve got those Dakota quadrangles to line up, anyway,” said the Captain. “We might as well kill two birds with one stone.”



"Yes, but they're always shrieking, 'Help, help!'" said Bob. "Congress ought to vote a rattle or a bottle of milk or something to keep them quiet."

"They've got a company of infantry now," said Mack.

"And a cook," observed the Captain tersely.

"Oh, very well, Captain Craig," said Bob, with an assumption of girlish offense. "I shall remember this."

The boathouse was now in sight, and never had it looked less welcome to Wesley. As they neared it he scanned the lawn and floats anxiously to see if any one was about, but the place seemed deserted.

"You boys better take in a show to-night," said the captain, "and if I don't see you again, get over to the Island by ten on Monday sure."

"Obedience to superiors," said Bob, apparently quoting, "is the keystone of success in the service. We will take in the show, Captain."

The captain laughed and looked at Wesley.

"You get out here?"

For a moment Wesley did not answer. Bob, overhearing the Captain's query, reached out for the clutch.

As far as Wesley had any plan at all it was to go straight home, wait till his father arrived from the city, and make a clean breast of everything. But now, suddenly, it came jumping into his head



that a better plan might be to go on down to the city, wait at the station for his father and come out with him. That would give him a chance to talk on the train. Best of all, it would enable him to postpone doing *anything* for a while, to put off the evil moment. For uppermost in his mind was his disinclination to land at Oakwood.

"Get out here?" the Captain repeated.

"N-no," said Wesley.

The Captain raised his eyes in surprise. "Nothing but marshes and brick-yards below here, is there?"

"I — I'll go right down to the city — if you don't mind."

"Mind? No, indeed," he said pleasantly, but looking at the boy sharply. "Did you paddle all the way up from the city? That was some paddle."

"It's where I be—it's where I'm going," said Wesley.

"False alarm, Captain?" called Bobby, still holding the clutch.

"False alarm, Bobby."

And Bobby, settling himself again upon the engine-locker, replaced the harmonica at his lips and completely enveloping it from view with both hands, began a lively rendering, with startling trills and variations, of "I'm Afraid to go Home in the Dark."



Wesley looked at him anxiously for a moment but seeing nothing in the least significant in Bobby's guileless countenance, decided that the tune had been selected by mere chance.



## CHAPTER V

### A FRIEND IN NEED

THE hurrying throng which surged through the gates to the waiting suburban trains that Saturday evening did not notice the tall boy who stood apart from the bundle-laden procession, waiting. Now and again, he glanced wistfully toward some little straggling group which, rushing pell-mell in his direction, heralded the arrival of another boat-load of commuters from the great metropolis. Crowd followed upon crowd and all were talking, laughing and pushing one another in good-natured haste. There seemed a kind of week-end good fellowship among them, and a care-free spirit, with the one dominating thought — to get home.

The boy was conscious of a little feeling of envy. He realized that *his* trip home would not be of the pleasantest. He must tell his father of the ruin of a canoe worth fifty dollars and of his having used three dollars and five cents which did not belong to him. He suspected that his father would not understand his coming all the way to the city when he could have waited at home with this un-



pleasant news, for in his heart he knew that he had done so simply from a weak dread of landing at Oakwood. The launch had set him ashore at a nearby wharf and gone chugging merrily off down the bay.

For the first half hour of waiting he was glad that his father did not come; he experienced a certain sense of relief as each throng of ferry arrivals passed and as he heard the first train for Oakwood starting. Wesley had never found it easy to make a confidant of his father (perhaps he was not entirely to blame for that), and he was wondering now how he should begin, what he should say, and how it would be received. He dreaded the ordeal. If he had had a mother, I dare say he would have gone straight home and found a loving ally in his trouble, who would have smoothed the path and made it easy for him. But he had a step-mother, and however much she may have deserved the boy's affection and respect, there was not much confidence between them. He thought of his own mother now; she would have understood, he felt sure; and it needed only this thought of the woman who had been so much his sympathizer and his friend but two short years before, to increase his nervousness and cause him to lose his grip upon himself.

There was a hot film before his eyes as he glanced up at the station clock and saw that the last of the early evening trains would leave in three min-



utes. Presently, he heard the metallic rattle of the mooring-wheel which told that another boat was in the slip. Then the crowds came hurrying, helter-skelter, for the train, and the boy tried to master his weakness and stood erect and manly, waiting for his father.

The crowd thinned out to a few stragglers and still Wesley's father had not come. Last of all there came a group of boys and a man who said, "Take your time, take your time, we've got a whole minute," and Wesley, startled at the voice, edged himself behind a laden baggage truck. All of the boys but one wore scout regalia. This one, who walked with the man, was tall and slim, with regular features and large, gray eyes. He was trying as he walked to balance on end a pole four or five feet long with canvas wrapped around it. The whimsical earnestness which he gave to this attempt seemed to amuse the man and provoked satirical comments generally. But a rebellious lock of wavy hair which fell over the boy's face proved his Waterloo, for in a quick, jerky attempt to brush it back, the pole fell to the ground.

"You big kid!" laughed one of the group.

"You want to paint that mast red so it'll match the canoe, Harry," observed a small boy.

"That wouldn't be much of a matchness," replied the one addressed. "The canoe is vermilion, if anybody should ask you. The next shade to ver-



million is vermillion; you learn that in the third grade."

"Yes," retorted the small boy; "and I know who told you to paint it vermilion, too; and you trotted right off like a good little china doll and did it, didn't you! It was Marjorie Danforth, and you're going to take her out canoeing to-night if there's a moon! Y-e-e-s!"

The man cast an amused look at the tall boy to see how he would take this. Then he winked at the speaker. In another moment they had all passed through the gate and disappeared.

To Wesley it had been but a brief, passing picture, but he emerged sick at heart. Whatever resolution he may have mustered was gone. To think of Arnold buying a mast and sail for a canoe which was ruined! And he expected to use it this very night! Then suddenly, Wesley realized what it meant to have missed his father. Well, in any event, he could do nothing here, so he started across toward the boat, but was roughly stopped by a guard who told him that if he wished to cross the ferry he must go through the waiting-room and buy a ticket. With a hope born of despair, he searched his pockets, but found not a cent. Yet there was but one thing to do now and that was to get across to the city where he had at least one friend, a fellow who used to live in Oakwood. There he could borrow money enough to go home on the one remaining train at midnight.



A little troubled smile, rather of nervousness than of mirth, hovered on the boy's lips as he wandered out of the station and along a neighboring wharf. It was almost dark but at the end of the wharf he saw a tug-boat and by it stood a very stout man in his shirt sleeves, smoking a pipe.

"Hello," said Wesley.

"How do, sonny," said the man.

"You're not going across — soon — I suppose — are you?" Wesley ventured anxiously.

"'Bout one minute, if you call that soon."

"Would you — could you — take me over?"

"I sure could; hop on. What's trouble, sonny — you cleaned out?"

"Not ex— well, I — want to economize," said Wesley.

"Well, now, you let me tell you, Noo York is a mighty poor place to go to if you want to economize, and you can take that with no extra charge from your Uncle Dudley.— Come up in the wheel-house where it's clean."

They were soon plowing out into mid-stream.

"I'll have to take you down far as Pier 8, but you won't mind a little trot back, with a good long pair o' legs like them. As the feller says, don't make no difference where you set me off so long as it's on terra cotta."

"That's the idea," said Wesley, absently. "Do you live right on board here?"



“Correct,” he said, looking straight ahead through the glass window.

Wesley liked the burly, hearty man. His talk made the boy forget his predicament for the few minutes it took them to cross the river. He, too, seemed to lead a care-free, gypsy kind of life, and Wesley felt that he would like to have a tug-boat for his home. There was a smell of oil and tarry rope about it that he liked.

He remembered the address of the apartment where his erstwhile friend lived and to this refuge he now looked as a shipwrecked mariner to his life-belt. At the house, the hall-boy told him that the family had moved away, out of town, he did not know where. It was the last straw, and at the matter-of-fact announcement which meant so little to the boy and so much to Wesley, he all but collapsed.

He had had a long tramp uptown and he was tired, utterly fagged out, so that it seemed he could not go another step. Troubled as he was, he felt that he could throw himself down on the deep, inviting leather settee in the apartment lobby and sleep for a week. For a moment he looked at it wistfully, then went out and down the crowded thoroughfare.

It was close upon midnight when he found himself again in the dark, unfrequented lower part of town, trudging through streets of warehouses,



where barrels stood about and there was the odor of rotting fruit. Once, he noticed some one lying in a doorway sound asleep.

"I can do that if I have to," he said.

He was so weary, so utterly exhausted, that he had to pause now and then and raise one foot to give it momentary rest. But there was one good thing, his bodily fatigue obliterated his mental trouble for the time. He came to Pier 8 and dragged himself along it to where the tug lay moored. Up in the wheel-house he could see his stout friend reading a newspaper, holding it in the glare of a cabin lamp. He was very conspicuous in his lighted enclosure, with silence and darkness all about. Wesley went aboard and up the ladder. He hesitated a moment, then opened the door and, leaning against the jamb, smiled a tired, almost ghastly, smile at the man's surprise.

"Here I am back again, like — like a bad penny," he said, with a pitiful note of entreaty in his voice. "If you can't let me stay here till morning, I won't have *any* place to stay."

"Stay? 'Course you can stay. Set down. That ain't been troublin' yer, has it? I was kind o' puzzled when I set yer ashore, but says I, that kid's going home and he'll be all right when he gets there. If I hadn't thought that, I wouldn't a' let yer go ashore cleaned out, any more'n I would my own son. But it tickled me when you started fer



to come across to Noo York to economize. Lord! I'd as soon think o' goin' to the North Pole to pick wild flowers! Glad you come back!"

"I walked up to One Hundred and Thirtieth Street and back; friends I know had moved away."

"So yer thought o' me, eh?"

"Yes, I — I kind of liked you," he blurted out.

"Well, that's right," said the man, approvingly.

"What's matter?"

"Oh, I don't know — I guess I'm just tired."

The man watched him closely for a moment while Wesley tried to control himself.

"D'yer stop anywheres goin' up-town or comin' down?"

"No."

The man left the wheel-house. Presently, a voice assailed Wesley's ears from somewhere below.

"Yer have yer eggs turned over?"

It was Sunday afternoon when Wesley awoke, and that night also he remained on the hospitable tug, somewhat of a mystery to its jovial captain. Seeing that the boy was preoccupied, he tried to draw him out, but his friendly efforts in that direction were fruitless. Through the dense fog of his tobacco-pipe, he observed the boy's wistful look and wondered what was passing in his mind. For a full two hours before dark, Wesley sat curled up on the old leather settee in the wheel-house, ab-



sorbed in a book of harbor charts with a lengthy introduction about salvage, wrecking work, and so forth.

"Guess you don't find that much like a Wild West story, eh?" his host ventured.

"I don't care for Wild West stories," said Wesley; "how do they make these soundings? They have to go right on the dangerous places, don't they?"

"Well, now," Captain Bocker drawled, "the folks that make life easy and safe for the rest of us, they have a pretty tough job of it, first and last, you may lay to that, sonny. And they're the fellows that don't get their names in the papers, neither. And they don't get paid neither, 'cause the world hasn't got money enough to pay 'em!"

He went down the ladder and Wesley, drawing his knees up and clasping his hands about them, looked out through the gathering darkness across the harbor. Thus the captain found him half an hour later when he came up to light the lamp.

"You dreamin' 'bout goin' to sea?" he queried, good-naturedly.

"No, just looking out of the window."

"Now, look here, sonny, you sure o' bein' able to find your father here in the city to-morrer? 'Cause —"

"Yes, I wasn't thinking about that.—What's that light, Captain Bocker?"



The man crossed the little room, placed his hand on Wesley's shoulder and stooping, looked off to where a certain small light shone across the water.

"That one over there?" he asked, cheerily; "why, Lord bless you, that's your old Uncle Samuel watchin' at the door — old Rough-and-Ready, I call him. He trudges round whilst me and you are asleep, that old feller, and some way it kind of cheers me up to see his light."

"You mean Governor's Island?"

"There you are — right the first time!" the captain said, pounding Wesley's shoulder as if to cheer him with his own contagious heartiness; "or Spotless Town, as the feller says. Well, he's good company, no matter where you find him, and that's a fact. It's pretty hard to say what he isn't up to these days. Here I was readin' the other night o' the jinks he's cuttin' up out in Dakoty and Montanny, alterin' rivers over to suit himself. Now you let that old duffer —"

"Uncle Sam?"

"That's him — you let that old duffer write a letter to Germany or any o' them foreign countries, or bust up some trust or other, and the whole world hears about it. But I tell *you*, what that old man can do with his hands and feet and a pick-ax and a tape-measure, has got *me*. An' him over a hundred years old! He's got some o' them western rivers guessin', and them bad lands, too; just gives



'em a drink o' water and makes 'em brace up. I tell you what, boy, it's what he does with his hands and feet that's got me!"

He sat down and lighting his pipe, proceeded to write up a greasy little memorandum book which seemed ridiculously out of proportion to the size of its owner.

"They've got some o' them geologist fellers over there, I guess. They was measurin' up the Passaic River, and then later they was up the Hudson — far as Sing Sing, I heard.— Well," he added, thumbing his little book, "a good many of us ought to be up that far, I guess."

"Why?" asked Wesley, turning quickly.

"Oh, not you, bless your soul!" laughed Captain Bocker. "Let's see, how old d'you say you was?"

"Eighteen.— Do you think, Captain Bocker, that it's better to work with your hands and feet than with your brain?"

"Well, sonny, I wouldn't just say that, but everybody's better for havin' some work to do with his hands and feet — as the feller says."

"What fellow?"

"Oh, that's just a way o' speaking. But you can make a note o' this, that the greatest man that ever came ashore on this here continent is always chokin' round and workin' with his hands and feet — and that's —"

"Uncle Sam?" laughed Wesley.



“ Right, the second time — and it’s good to hear you laugh.”

“ It’s good to hear you talk, Captain Bocker.”



## CHAPTER VI

### ON THE SUBJECT OF FIGHTING

ALL night long the light gleamed across the water and in the troubled intervals of sleep Wesley would single it out from the others and watch it as if it had some special lure for him. Once he fell to wondering how men made soundings on the ocean, and again, whether people really jumped from cliffs and were thrown from runaway horses just to make motion-pictures. He smiled at the mind's-eye picture of Uncle Sam lifting his red, white and blue coat-tails to pull a tape-measure out of his back pocket. Then he wondered how Captain Bocker could see to steer with such clouds of tobacco smoke in front of him. Then he fell to thinking of Oakwood, and of Sparrow, and of — of what he should do when the broad, practical daylight of Monday morning stared him in the face.

At last the day came, the strenuous, busy day, and with it the crowds surging across the neighboring ferry. Everybody seemed so alive, so purposeful!

The boy hurried along with the surging multitude, to go to his father's office. What else was



there to do? He realized what a bungle he had made of this whole business. The longer he waited, the harder it was. And now he had got himself into a position where he felt something like a fugitive. He did not like that feeling. He would put the whole matter in his father's hands at once, face the music, and have done with it. At least, there would be no more bungling.

He wished that his father had not talked so much lately of the need of economy. He had decided not to have the lawn graded because it would cost fifty dollars. Wesley thought wistfully how much easier would be this unpleasant task if his father were more like Sparrow, or Captain Brocker. He had said many times that he never wanted to work for his father.

When he came to the building, instead of going up in the elevator, he walked the entire eight flights, taking his time at it, pausing on the landings and looking from the windows. When at last he tried the door of his father's office it was locked. He was surprised at that, but a little relieved as well, for it gave him a little more time. Down on the main floor he accosted the elevator starter.

"Hasn't Mr. Binford come in yet?"

"He's out of town; went away Saturday morning."

"W-where, do you know?" gasped Wesley.

"South, I think; guess the stenographer's up there."



Wesley walked out into the street again. He did not know whether he was glad or sorry. The feeling that he was immediately conscious of was that of relief. He thrust his hands down into his empty pockets. He would have to straighten out this tangle himself now. What should he do? Where should he go? He drew a long, nervous breath and, walking to the corner, stood there while hurrying men and women brushed by, indifferent to everything except his own troubled thoughts.

And whenever I think of Wesley Binford now, knowing the rest of the story as I do, I like to think of him as he stood there alone on a corner in the great city that Monday morning with that weight upon his mind and not a cent in his pockets; alone, save for a haunting conscience and the memory of an unfortunate episode which he himself had made the worse by weakness and procrastination. What to do? Where to go? Well, in any event, be his decision wise or foolish, good or bad, it would at least be his own. His own conceit, his own silly pride, his own swaggering affectation had dragged him into dishonesty and humiliation and brought him here to the parting of the ways, where he must act and act quickly, and be the master of his own destiny.

A thought which had been lurking in his mind all night, but which he had put aside to go and see his father, suddenly asserted itself and inspired him



with cheerfulness and hope and resolution. He would do three things, but the second and third would depend upon the first. Under the spell of his new purpose, he laughed outright at a certain whimsical thought which came into his mind.

"Couldn't find my father," he said; "now for a call on my uncle."

But the merry laugh was only momentary, for he was still nervous and doubtful and apprehensive.

Captain Ellsworth Burton Craig, army engineer, field geographer, forestry specialist, hydraulic expert, and a few other things, sat at a well-worn table in a secluded corner of the officers' quarters at Governor's Island, New York. The surroundings were immaculate, but no more immaculate than Captain Ellsworth Burton Craig. His greenish khaki suit fitted his trim, clean-cut figure to perfection, and the only suggestion of a break in the precision and orderliness of his apparel was that the khaki belt which ran through vertical khaki plaits was not buttoned in front, its ends hanging, or rather standing, loose. It gave the one attractive touch of carelessness to his attire which certain young gentlemen of my acquaintance seek to effect by studiously leaving the lower waistcoat button unfastened. But this was the funny thing, that Captain Craig's manner and mind had the same suggestion of being trim, immaculate and clean-cut, with just that one



little dab of attractive offhandedness which made his strictest orders, his severest reprimands, palatable.

If you could have seen him place his finger-ends on the edges of those neat little rimless glasses, remove them, hold them up to the light and then replace them, you would never have supposed that he had any relation at all to those terrific forest rangers whom we read about. I suppose that, first and last, Bobby Cullen knew him as well as any one, and once when they were stalled in Washington, Bobby told the boys over in the Department of Agriculture that not in three years had the captain's fingers ever touched the flat side of those precious lenses. Of course, I am not going to ask you to swallow everything that Bobby Cullen says, but he undoubtedly had the captain down to a T. He had "lined up" the Yukon with him up in Alaska; he had helped him on the irrigation system in New Mexico; he had revetted the Upper Mississippi with him and surveyed all the quadrangles north of  $48^{\circ}$  from the Pacific to the Rockies. Sometimes the Forestry people got their covetous hands on the captain, sometimes it was the "R.S." (for you must know that the Geological Survey is everybody's friend); and wherever the captain went, and for whatever exercise of his versatile talents, there also went Bobby Cullen, with his harmonica — like Good Man Friday.

On a big map before the captain lay a telegram



which he had just read with great annoyance, for it told him to send MacConnell (otherwise Mack) to Washington at once for — for something or other, the captain did not care much what. He had a sovereign contempt for Washington, he knew that, and their reasons were nothing to him. Once in a while they managed to lasso him on the run and march him before a Senate or House committee to enlighten them as to some enterprise or proposed expenditure, and it was as good as a three-ring circus to hear the crisp, funny answers that he gave them, and see the fidgety way in which he would seem to count these precious minutes. Bobby Cullen always got up in the gallery on these occasions — but he kept his harmonica in his pocket.

The captain glanced out over the well-kept lawn and noticed a few stragglers who were coming up the gravel walk. Evidently, Uncle Sam's little steamer was in. There were some soldiers back from leave, an officer or two, a little group of sight-seers, and a tall young fellow of about eighteen, who came along last of all, and who seemed neither sight-seer nor attaché. His once natty blue serge suit was sadly wrinkled, there were whitish areas on his russet shoes which suggested recent immersion, his linen was soiled and wilted. The captain scrutinized him for a moment until the youth disappeared around the corner, then fell to spreading a pair of dividers across the map.



“What is it?” he asked, abstractedly. “Bobby come over on that boat?”

A sentinel who stood at attention in the doorway replied, “A young man would like to see you, sir; gives his name as Wesley Binford.”

“Let him come in.”

If Wesley had been uneasy in the captain's presence before, he was doubly uncomfortable now. The boy who had but recently boasted that it would be “his deal when it came to fairy tales” felt his heart pounding in his breast as he stood there, humbly waiting.

“I don't suppose you remember me, sir,” he said, when the captain at last looked up.

“Oh, yes, I remember you very well,” said the captain, crisply. “Will you be seated? You didn't get pneumonia, I see.”

Wesley had never applied for a position in his life; despite his vaunted manliness and worldly experience, he had had no dealings with men, and he was so ignorant of military ways and life that he had suffered the utmost trepidation from the moment he set foot on the island, asking his direction of the first sentinel he had seen, in a vague fear that he might be making some terrible error which would presently land him in the military lock-up. Like most boys he had a curious feeling that army rule and discipline involved the general public in some way, and that he had better be very careful what



he said and whom he addressed in this place of guns and uniforms and cannons, if he wanted to avoid trouble. He had a haunting fear that he might address a general without knowing it, and what would happen then? The plain, everyday invitation to be seated was very grateful to him.

For a minute Captain Craig moved his dividers across the map, and Wesley relieved the tension of suspense by watching the stiff, steel legs swaggering tipsily under his guidance.

Suddenly he was seized with a reckless impulse to make an offhand, irrelevant remark. He didn't suppose that boys ever did such things in the presence of army officers and right in military quarters, but before he knew it he had yielded to the impulse and the remark was out.

"It doesn't take long to get across the country that way, does it?" he said, smiling hesitatingly. No one ever saw Wesley smile that way without liking him, and the captain laid down his dividers and smiled pleasantly himself.

"No, just a hop, skip and a jump," said he. "Now, what can I do for you?"

"I don't suppose you'll feel like doing anything much for me after seeing what a fool I was; you saved my life and I guess that's about all I ought to ask."

By this time Wesley was nervously handling a lead pencil which he had taken from his pocket, but



the captain (unlike most men in such an interview) was handling nothing. His two hands rested motionless on the arms of his chair, and he was looking through his neat little glasses straight at his visitor.

“And what had you thought of doing with your life now that it has been saved?”

“That’s just what I wanted to see you about, sir.”

“I see,” he encouraged.

“Would — could you, do you think, help me — perhaps?”

The captain raised his brows in surprise. “You mean in government service?”

“Well, yes, sir, that’s what I thought; of course, I don’t know anything about such things,” Wesley added, somewhat abashed at the captain’s expression; “I suppose probably you have to have pull, but it’s been in my mind ever since Saturday, and — I suppose it’s pretty nervy for me to come and see you — but I kind of feel as if I’d like to go off and do the kind of things you and those two fellows do; I feel as if I’d just like to go far away and do something that’s — well, real, as you might say, and — and dangerous.”

“Dangerous, eh?” the captain smiled.

“Well, not exactly that,” Wesley corrected, with a little apologetic laugh, “but kind of — well, *real* — I guess that’s the word. Maybe if I knew you better, and wasn’t so — well, I don’t mean exactly



afraid of you," he stumbled, "but maybe if I wasn't so rattled," he added, with boyish frankness, "maybe I could tell you what I mean."

Captain Craig nodded.

"Did any one tell you that our work was real, as you say, or did you think of that yourself?"

"Well, somebody told me that you got to be kind of serene like, being in the woods and the mountains so much, and then I got to thinking about it and how I couldn't swim and — I guess in your kind of work you don't have to tell lies — do you?"

Wesley was so hesitating and nervous that he felt he must be showing at his very worst. But on the contrary he was at his very best and the captain saw this.

"Then you think that in some businesses one has to tell lies?"

"Yes, sir — don't you?"

"I?" he queried amusedly, but refrained from expressing himself on that point. Instead, he picked up the telegram from Washington, glanced at it musingly, and laid it down. Wesley felt that he had made a very poor impression, but he was never more mistaken in his life.

"Well, what can you do that's useful?"

Wesley hesitated, and then told of the only thing that he knew how to do, and do well.

"I can print," said he.

"Lettering, you mean?"



"Yes, sir, it's just kind of a knack, that's all. Sometimes they get me to letter the names on canoes and motor-boats."

"You've never studied drafting?"

"No, sir."

The captain pushed a piece of paper toward him.

"Let me see you letter your name."

The hand which took the pencil trembled visibly.

"May I use that ruler to rest my hand against? They always do that."

"Certainly."

"Maybe you'd rather have me print something else than my own name, because I'm used to that and can do it better."

"Print my name — Captain Ellsworth Burton Craig, U.S.A."

The hand which, steadied against the slanted ruler, guided the pencil, still shook nervously. This one accomplishment, which was just a natural gift, had never before been put to the test. He held his pencil ready, waiting patiently till his hand should cease to tremble. Then, slowly but with unerring precision, each perfect letter was formed. The name stood there symmetrical and perfect.

"Hmmm," said Captain Craig, taking the paper; "that's quite remarkable."

"Of course, I could do better with regular drawing-ink."

"What else can you do?"



"Nothing much; my father doesn't think *that* amounts to anything. He says the only thing I can do is play the mandolin. I guess that's not of very much use, either."

"Oh, music is always useful," the captain observed. "If a regiment of soldiers is on a twenty days' march they'll save two days and four hours if there's music along."

"I thought music was just — just for fun."

"Oh, no, it's a great time-saver; Uncle Sam pays out a good deal of money in the course of a year for music."

"Well, then," said Wesley, in a kind of disheartened way, "there's two things I can do, anyway."

"I think you're a bit discouraged, eh?" said the captain.

"I'd like to go to war," said Wesley; "that's just the way I feel — and get killed, maybe. That's what a fellow used to do in the old days when he felt that he wasn't much good and the world had no use for him."

"Is it, indeed?"

"Only there aren't any wars nowadays."

"No?"

"That is, not unless we have one with Mexico."

"That wouldn't be much of a war," said the captain, dryly. "I wouldn't be killed in a war if I were you unless it were a good one, a good big one, one that was *real*, to use your own expression.



A boy who can print like that ought not to bother getting killed in a little, popular-price, cut-rate war."

He looked sideways at Wesley in that alert, decisive way, and the boy couldn't help laughing.

The captain removed his glasses, held them up toward the window, and replaced them carefully upon his nose.

"So you think there is no war on. Well, now, let us see. Suppose I were to tell you that many square miles of our territory, farms, vast fields of growing crops, populous towns, were captured last year by an enemy — a national enemy — an enemy whose forces roamed at will through the heart of our land — an enemy with two powerful allies; that they left death, havoc, devastation, ruin, in their path. What if I were to tell you that when the fight was over, we found that we had suffered a loss of life greater than that caused by any battle since the Battle of Gettysburg. What if I were to tell you that the enemy effected a night march of fifty-seven miles in an hour and twenty minutes, threw its flanks over eighty miles of country, surrounded and laid waste eleven towns — right here under the very nose of Uncle Sam. Suppose I were to tell you that the spoils of this great victory, the booty that was carried off was more than four hundred million tons of good American property — more than twice as much material as was excavated for the Panama Canal. Now, what would you say?"



He had spoken rapidly and convincingly; and it left Wesley staring.

"Were — were you in it?" he asked.

"I was in the thick of it."

Wesley continued to stare.

"We never heard of that out our way; would you mind telling me who the enemy was?"

"Not at all — it was the Mississippi River."

"The Mississ—?"

"You don't suppose Mexico could hand us a fight like that, do you?"

"Well, I guess, No!"

Captain Craig appeared to ponder a minute, then spoke in a changed tone. Despite his dry, choppy manner, there was a note of encouragement in his words.

"I rather like the way you have talked to me, my boy; and I think the lettering you do is quite remarkable and might prove useful. Now, circumstances have come together in such a way that I may be able to help you. If so it will depend entirely upon yourself. When I saw you the other day you impressed me as being very fresh and conceited and as having a very exaggerated idea of your own importance. I am inclined now to amend that view somewhat. Of course, you have no technical knowledge or training of any kind. You could not, even with what you call 'pull,' secure a field appointment in either of the govern-



mental departments with which I am affiliated; that is, the Department of Agriculture and the Department of the Interior. The Geological Survey, with which I am directly connected, is in the latter department. If I helped you at all it would only be by very broadly construing my authority, and my responsibility in such a matter, or my culpability, would hinge very largely on your own usefulness in the unskilled duties to which you would be assigned.

"I have the right to engage extra help at my discretion. I am not so sure that I have the right to hire a young man in New York and cart him across the continent on the supposition that he may prove useful. There are a great many young men to be had on the spot. Still, I think the lettering you do may furnish me an excuse for taking you along. At all events, we have railroad transportation for one, and I am tempted to keep it and use it — and let you come along. We shall be surveying some country along the Missouri River, and assisting one of the other departments in conservation work; that is, the prevention and handling of floods, and the development of rivers. You would doubtless meet some of the Forestry boys also, for I suspect we shall be thrown with them somewhat in surveying and advising them regarding their reserves.

"Of course," he added, with just the suggestion



of a smile, "one inexperienced boy more or less wouldn't affect the work in any sense, but I find myself so much interested in you that I should dislike exceedingly to think of your hiding your martial spirit, and pining away as a shipping clerk or a bank messenger on the supposition that there is no fighting going on."

Wesley laughed good-humoredly, and the captain sat back pondering.

"I want to get into that fight, Captain Craig; I hope you'll decide right now to let me go. I'll do my very best."

"I will take the responsibility of offering you twenty-five dollars a month, and of course your living will be furnished you. You will do anything that you are told to do. If, through negligence or incompetence, you fail to make good, you will be dismissed forthwith and your fare paid to the nearest city — which would probably be Helena, Montana. If you do well your services will be appreciated. What do you say?"

"I say I'll go, and that I thank you — and that I will do my very best — and —" He almost broke down.

"Very well; then you may get your things ready and come over on the boat late this afternoon. There's one that leaves the Battery about five. You'll find Bobby Cullen on it, probably. Tell him to give you a few pointers. Don't try to show off before him — he'd only take you down."



"Good-by, Captain Craig, and thank you — thank you very much. I'll be here, all right."

"Good-by, my boy," said the captain, rising and taking his hand. "We'll have a good fight," he added, cheerily. "How old are you, Wesley?"

It sounded good to hear his own name in that way.

"Eighteen," he said.

"So? You're tall for your age; you'd be taller still if you threw your shoulders back. Well, good-by."

"Good—good-by, Captain." For a moment he hesitated, not quite knowing whether he ought to salute, and wondering how to do it.

"You want to josh Bobby about his harmonica," said the captain; "don't forget about that."

"No, sir, I won't," laughed Wesley. "Good-by till to-night."

His fear of military discipline and etiquette and his notions about army officers had changed somewhat.



## CHAPTER VII

### THE ENEMY'S FIRST MOVE

WESLEY was greatly relieved that Captain Craig had asked him nothing about his home nor any question which might have made it necessary for him to say that his plans were not known to his family. But now a dilemma confronted him. He must not appear empty-handed before the captain, for that would surely excite remark and perhaps suspicion. He must have something in the form of baggage, both for appearance's sake and because certain articles were indispensable. Also, he told himself, ruefully, he was very hungry.

It was in this predicament and when he had about reached his wits' end, fearing that now at the last moment his opportunity and his plans were to be ruined, that he noticed a musty-looking store, which suggested to him an expedient he had never dreamed of in his life before. The very sight of the window, indiscriminately filled with old and ill-assorted trifles, reminded Wesley to what a low ebb he had run, and through what sordid and pride-racking channels he must go before the tide of his life turned.



He walked past the place several times before he could muster the courage to go in, then he entered and fumbling nervously he removed from his waistcoat the little High School fraternity pin which he always wore.

The man took it, scrutinized it, and said, "How much?"

"I would like to get five dollars," said Wesley.

"I'll let you have four."

"All right," said Wesley, glad to make an end of such an interview. His voice almost trembled with embarrassment and humiliation as he took the four bills and a little ticket, which he did not read but thrust in his pocket as if to get it out of his sight. Then he went out of the musty den to where the bright sun was shining. He thought that people must be looking at him, but was surprised to find that no one seemed to notice. To Wesley it was an awful experience.

He bought himself a belated luncheon, the effect of which was to bring back some measure of his lost pride. Then he purchased for seventy-five cents a pasteboard suitcase with a cheap coating of oil-cloth paint. It was one of a number which were chained together outside a trunk store and was said to be "marked down" from a fabulous price. So Wesley felt that fortune was favoring him. He next bought a pair of corduroy trousers, two coarse blue flannel shirts and some cheap underwear. He



made these sumptuous purchases with a certain rueful amusement, for he had never gone in much for the "roughing it" attire which the Scout movement had done so much to popularize. Wesley had always worn frightfully high collars and prided himself on knowing how to tie a four-in-hand. He also bought a writing-pad.

When his shopping was finished he had eighteen cents left. But he felt that he was well started now and that when a certain other unpleasant duty was performed, he might see the clouds breaking and a clear way ahead. He was keenly expectant, hopeful, almost happy.

It was in this new mood of unaffected and fresh enthusiasm that Captain Craig saw him when he and Bobby Cullen arrived together in the middle of the afternoon. In Wesley's pocket were two unfinished letters, both liberally adorned with erasures, corrections and interlinings. They were evidently in a formative stage and intended for further revision and final copying before mailing. He had produced them in Battery Park while waiting for the government boat. One was to his father, the other was to Harry Arnold, but both were much the same in substance. The one to Harry Arnold ran:

DEAR HARRY:—

Last Saturday I took your canoe. The locker



was locked — but I tapped the padlock. Of course, I ought not to have done it, but I meant to put it back before you got home and anyway I thought you wouldn't mind. When I got up to Sparrow's Honor reminded me of some money I hadn't paid left over from last year. And I took some money — three dollars and five cents — out of your mack-inaw and paid it. It was a dishonest thing to do but I didn't mean it that way, because Billy Ackerson was going to buy my bicycle and I intended to put back what I stole before you found it out. I expected the whole thing would be straightened out in an hour or so. But of course I realize now that I would have been a thief for that long anyway. On the way down I smashed your canoe because I didn't know the channel, as any fool does, so that is a good lesson too. I was rescued but I would rather not tell yet who rescued me. I'm sorry I didn't let you teach me to swim two years ago when you offered to. I was all rattled and when I came to myself and got to thinking I realized that I owed you fifty-three dollars and five cents, and that all of it was stolen as you might say. And when I got to thinking I thought of a lot of other things too, for that's the way it is. Now I've gone away not because I am afraid. At first I was kind of afraid, but not now, only I have a plan so it will be all myself and nobody else that makes good.— You wouldn't think a girl like Honor Sparrow who



looks at you so straight could start a fellow doing — but it was just because she did look at me so straight that I tumbled over — as you might say. But — well I guess I can't tell you what I mean, but anyway she had me sized up and knew I was bluffing. Now, Harry, I write you this letter because I am going away to earn money to pay you. So I can give back what belongs to you — though I stole because I was a fool and not because I meant to be dishonest. I know you will believe that and when all this gets to be known I wish you would try to make Honor Sparrow believe it too. And tell Sparrow I found out he is right. I have got a job very far away and unless you want the money very much, Harry, please don't take it from my father for that wouldn't be *me* paying you back. And I know you expect to go away somewhere yourself so maybe you wouldn't get another canoe just yet anyway. I'm going to get twenty-five dollars a month and my board too. So I'm going to send you twenty-five dollars — that is all my — I mean all *your* money — the end of the first month and the same at the end of the second month, and the next month I will send the other three dollars and five cents. And after you get it all I want you to say to yourself that I'm not a thief and try to make my father believe it too, for I know you are the kind of fellow who won't misjudge me. I think my father has more use for you than he has for me



so please talk to him and try to make him understand what I write to him. That's a hard thing for a fellow to admit, but it's true, Harry. But I've made one friend who believes in me so —

That was as far as the rough draft went. It had been his intention to copy and mail these letters before starting, but things moved so briskly from the moment he rejoined the captain that he was in Philadelphia before he knew it, with these rough drafts still in his pocket. Between Philadelphia and Pittsburgh he lay awake in his berth pondering them, and between Pittsburgh and Chicago they suffered relentless overhauling. The boy seemed possessed by a perfect craze to get the right words and to call things by their names. The letters in their final and accepted form narrowly escaped mailing at Minneapolis, and then came within an ace of being carried all the way out to the headwaters of the Missouri in the interest of this odd scrupulousness. When they finally did start upon their travels back they bore the postmark of Williston, North Dakota.

And that was the last that was ever heard of one of them, and even the other, filthy and saturated, but rescued by Uncle Sam, was not delivered to Harry in Oakwood. For a certain minor ally of the mighty host with whom Wesley Binford hoped later to cope, had already begun in true military



fashion by intercepting communications of the enemy. Captain Craig would have called it just a preliminary skirmish of this little ally. It came out of winter quarters somewhere in the fastnesses above the American border, where it had rested in the form of snow and ice throughout the long winter.

Melting, it poured down hillside, over precipice and through many a rocky cranny and deep ravine, and into the channel of Blue River. Then, sweeping in its mad career through this river's valley in northern Minnesota, it surprised the little town of Conner's Junction, and put it out of business. A little east of Valley Station, a few miles farther down, it caught the railroad bridge, uprooted it, toppled it over, scattered the wreckage and bore the fragments along with it as prisoners of war. It carried off the telegraph wires, too, in a hopeless tangle. And in that same hour the train which bore Wesley's letters eastward went plunging headlong over the embankment into the turbulent waters.

And so it came about that a few days later a little solemn group of boys stood upon the shore of a well-behaved and modest stream a mile or two above their home in Oakwood, New Jersey, and watched with bated breath a certain spot nearby where two of the husky fishermen whom he had so despised, were dragging the river for the body of Wesley Binford.



## CHAPTER VIII

### THE OTHER BOY

"COME on, Kid, there's nothing here."

The boy who spoke had stood with the other watchers for half an hour, and his voice was the first to break the awesome silence. There was something in his tone which intimated that he had only waited in deference to the others; that the result was as he had expected.

"We can't pull the net through all them dead limbs," one of the fishermen called; "it's a reg'lar jungle down under there. If one o' you boys cares to trot up as far as Sparrow's place, he may have a grappling iron."

The man's brusque voice and matter-of-fact words seemed to lift the spell. They seemed strangely out of keeping with the atmosphere of suspense and solemnity. Brick Parks looked toward the boy who had withdrawn a few feet, as if to leave. The little fellow whom the latter had called Kid also looked at him as if to express a suggestion he did not like to put in words.

The first speaker sauntered back, his hands in his trousers pockets.



"You want me to dive?" he asked, quietly.

"He says he'll dive," one of the boys called to the fishermen.

"Who? You?" called the man; "you'll want an ax to chop your way out — if you don't crack your head going down!" He said something to his companion about "fool talk," which the boys could not hear distinctly.

"I'll dive a little way above and then swim down," the boy said in a low voice to his companions, ignoring the men. There was a suggestion of half-heartedness, of careless but willing resignation, in his tone.

"Don't if you don't think it's safe, Harry."

He made no answer, but proceeded to remove his shoes, a blue flannel, double-breasted shirt, and the undershirt beneath it. His trousers were held up by a narrow leather belt, and this he pulled tight. Then he picked his way over rock and fallen tree a few yards and out onto the old water-logged float.

He was a tall boy, slender, but with nothing of the ungainly look which suggests too rapid growth. The fact that they had all turned to him as to the one who might naturally be expected to do this thing would seem to imply that he had some reputation for athletic skill and prowess, yet he had not those ostentatiously square shoulders which one associates with matted hair and sweaters with embroidered letters. Nor had he that aggressive



stride which bespeaks the college gladiator. Rather might he have been likened to a deer or a panther, for nature seemed to have solved for him that problem which she does not often solve for a boy of being graceful without being effeminate. He was, in a word, one of those boys whom other boys imitate and whom girls talk about. But this is between you and me; *he* never knew it.

He must have known the river pretty well to dive anywhere thereabout, for the spot had a bad reputation, first and last. But he went in with a splash and it seemed to the waiters fully five minutes before he reappeared out of the submerged thicket, throwing his head far back and brushing back his dripping hair by repeated swings of his forearm.

"No sign?" some one called.

He shook his head as he clambered up, extricating himself from the tangle of slimy branches. "Here, catch this," he panted, throwing a bedraggled garment toward the group. It was his own mackinaw jacket.

"You're some eel, Harry."

"No sign of — it — at all, Harry?" asked the small boy.

He shook his head again, throwing himself on the grass in the broad sunlight.

"Went down with the tide, just as I said," observed one of the men in the boat. "We'll just have to wait till the river gets good and ready;



she'll take her own time about it, like she always does — you can't hurry her none. Look at old Topley, they didn't find him for near a month, and then way down the bay."

"Same as 'twas with that Barnard youngster," rejoined the other man. "He came up in one of them dredge-scoops, six weeks after."

"*You* was lucky to wriggle up through all that stuff," said the first man, addressing Harry. "Beats all how a confounded fool will come out safe — kinder like a sleep walker."

The boy on the grass acknowledged this compliment with a little laugh, but otherwise paid no attention to the conversation.

"Coming up to Sparrow's?" said Brick Parks. Harry shook his head.

"No, I'm going to lie here and let the gentle zephyrs dry me out."

"Who's going up to Sparrow's?" said Brick Parks, bent on mustering recruits.

"I promised I'd go up and tell him the result, anyway," said Howard Brent.

"Trot along," encouraged Harry; "go on up with them, Kid."

"No, I'm going to stay here and go down with you."

The boy who was capable of the supreme sacrifice of foregoing an ice cream cone to remain with his friend, was small and compact in stature, with



dancing brown eyes, face as brown as a mulatto, teeth as white as ivory, head as round as a globe and hair as curly as — as anything. He wore the complete regalia of the Boy Scouts, with the tracking badge and the stalking badge conspicuously displayed, and looked as if he might have stepped out of the latest edition of the Scout Manual. He was, I should like to inform you, mascot of the Beaver Patrol, whose color was brown, for which reason he was wont to bare his arms and neck to the pelting sun each spring in order that he might wear the colors of his beloved patrol throughout the summer in a patriotic and loyal coat of tan.

He it was who invented the famous picnic instrument for getting olives out of the bottom of a bottle, which entirely obviated the use of hat-pins for that purpose; and he it was who first thought of putting a blanket on a shade-roller fastened to the footboard of the bed, so that all you had to do was to give it a little start when you were too sleepy to arouse yourself to the exertion of pulling it up and throwing it off. In a word, he had benefited the world in many ways; his inventions were known all over the — house. But his efforts at reforming and “scouterizing” Harry Arnold had proved a dismal and heart-rending failure. For Harry would not wear the scout uniform.

Harry had himself been patrol leader of the Beavers, but during a two-years’ absence in Panama



that position had fallen to Brick Parks. Gordon had voted against Brick Parks' elevation to patrol leader on the ground that his hair was red, whereas the Beaver color was brown, but the election was carried by a quorum during Gordon's absence, and when Harry returned from Panama Dr. Brent had made him a sort of assistant scout-master. He had, indeed, occupied such a position while on the Isthmus, for Mr. Barney, the captain of the steam shovel on which Harry had worked, had been in charge of the Panama scouts, and had enlisted Harry's help with them. Near the end of his two-years' work on the canal, Gordon had made a trip to the Isthmus in company with his Missouri cousins, Will and Joe Howell, and their father, who was sent by the United States government to make some statistical comparisons there. Gordon had thus made the acquaintance of several good friends of Harry's, among them Jack Holden, a Missouri boy then stationed with the Tenth Regiment of Infantry at Panama, and Mr. Carleton Conne who was engaged in gathering motion-picture material on the Isthmus.

"You didn't seem to take much interest in finding it, Harry."

"Because I knew it wasn't there."

"You think he floated —"

"He isn't in the river, Kid; he's alive," said Harry, softly.



"You're the first person to say that, Harry! Why, Mr. Binford had the county detective — Blauvelt — and another man come up and look all around, and they said it was surely here that it happened, because here's where the spiked beam was that stove in the canoe, and then they examined the shore just like Monsieur — Something-or-other — you know that famous French detective, Harry, and there wasn't any sign of footprints anywhere. He couldn't have got to shore or Blauvelt would have found some sign of it, but he didn't even —"

"He didn't even find this," Harry interrupted, pointing to his mackinaw jacket. "It was hanging just like on a hat-rack, not six inches under water."

"Why didn't you come up the first day, Harry? You knew it was your canoe."

"Oh, I don't know, Kid, I just didn't want to; I didn't want to see the canoe."

"It seems awfully funny for Wesley Binford not to be here, doesn't it?" said the younger boy, after a pause. "I was always meeting him around town."

Harry rose and led the way into a clump of bushes. There, drawn up above flood-tide, lay the wreck of the vermilion canoe.

"Here's something else that Blauvelt didn't see, Kid," he said, in the subdued voice which the scene and the memory of what had happened there seemed to prompt.



"He did, Harry; it was he that pulled it up."

"I don't mean the canoe, Kid, but look here."

He pointed to a round, black spot close under the gunwale and about midway of the canoe's length. It was about as large as a small saucer, and its edges had a frayed look which suggested the pictures one sometimes sees of the sun.

"What is it, Harry?"

The older boy rubbed it and held his blackened finger up to Gordon. "It was made by the exhaust of a launch," said he.

"It might have happened before the — before the accident," said Gordon.

"It must have happened after the canoe was swamped, or it wouldn't be up so near the gunwale. When the thing happened the canoe must have been brought alongside a launch and held there close against the exhaust. Wesley was rescued, Kid."

For a minute Gordon was speechless. Then, suddenly, he began dancing up and down.

"You're wrong, Harry, you're wrong, you're wrong, you're wrong!"

"Don't, Kid," said Harry, quietly.

"Well, anyway, Harry, if he was rescued by a launch the launch must have stopped to rescue him."

"Sure."

"Well, then, the exhaust wouldn't be puffing when the boat was standing still and the engine not going."



"But the engine might have kept on going while the boat was standing — if it had a clutch."

"There's no motor-boat up this way that's got a clutch," said Gordon, triumphantly.

"Which simply proves," said Harry, "that there's no use looking for Wesley Binford along this river. He was rescued by some boat that doesn't belong up this way. She has a heavy-duty engine, too, if it's any comfort for you to know it; a one-cylinder, probably a four-cycle."

He was sober, but still amused at Gordon's surprise.

"Why, Harry?"

"Otherwise she'd have kicked faster and spat-tered more. She wasn't a very new boat either."

"Why?"

"Or she'd have her exhaust under water — or at least through her transom. I'm glad the man who was running it didn't understand the engine very well."

"The same, Harry — why?"

"Gave her too much oil; see how nice and thick and black she prints." And to prove it he drew a streak of the oil-laden smoke across Gordon's astonished visage. "Come on, let's go home, Kid."

"Harry, you're more obtuse than Mr. Blauvelt — I mean astute."

"You don't mean that for a compliment, do you, Kid? Because Blauvelt always puts on a pair of blinders when he goes hunting for clews."



"Well, then, you're as good as a detective in a book."

"Now, you're talking."

"Harry, authors are supposed to know everything, aren't they?"

"Guess so."

"Gee, it must be fine to be an author."

Harry could not help laughing as Gordon trudged along beside him, talking volubly.

"Say, Harry, if a good boy in a book has a friend he's called a chum, but if a bad boy has a friend he's called a crony. Why is that?"

"I haven't the slightest idea, Kid."

"Why does an author call a boy a lad?"

"Give it up."

"Nobody else does."

"They know all about everything except boys, Kid."

"Do you like long chapters or short chapters best?"

"I think I'll take short chapters for mine."

"There's where you're wrong; long chapters are best. Now often at night when I'm reading my mother tells me I'll have to go to bed when I finish the chapter. So I believe in long chapters. That's why I like *Robinson Crusoe*, because it hasn't got any chapters at all. One night I was reading *Robinson Crusoe*, and she told me I must go to bed when I finished the chapter. Cracky, I sat up for



three hours, Harry, till everybody else went to bed."

"I'll remember that if I ever write a book."

"Harry, do you think you'll go out west and start on that conversation work this spring?"

Harry laughed outright. "I guess you'd be the proper one to go if it was a case of conversation work, Kiddo."

"Well, it's some kind of 'con' work."

"'Conservation' is what the government calls it."

"I hope you won't hear from my uncle; I'd rather have you stay here this summer. Cracky, you and I don't seem to be together any more at all."

"Well, maybe I won't hear, Kid, but I hope I will."

"He's a dandy, my uncle is, isn't he?"

"You bet."

"He inherits it from his sons, Harry; they're both dandy fellows, even if they *are* jolliers."

"You mean lads, Kid?"

"Yes, sturdy lads," laughed Gordon.

A silence fell upon the pair as they strolled along, Gordon revolving these and other sundry matters in his active mind.

Meanwhile, Harry opened the flap pocket of his mackinaw and removed the change and saturated bills. He counted the money, paused as if puzzled, then counted it again.

"Any missing, Harry?"



"N-no, guess not."

"It couldn't have fallen out with the pocket buttoned down."

"No," said Harry, thrusting the money into his trousers pocket; but the puzzled look did not leave his face.

"I kind of liked Wesley Binford, didn't you, Harry? There was something about him I couldn't help liking."

"Yes, I did, Kid — and I do."

"Will you get a new canoe?"

"Not yet, anyway; not till I know what I'm going to do."

"Where do you suppose he's gone, Harry?"

Harry shook his head and again they strolled on in silence.

"Do you suppose we'll ever see Mr. Carleton Conne again, Harry?"

"'Fraid not, Kid; he was all right, wasn't he?"

"Oh, *wasn't* he great?"

"I suppose he's making motion-pictures at the North Pole now," Harry mused. "I'd give a mess of pottage, whatever that is, to see him, I know that."

"A prince's ransom is better — that's what people usually talk about giving."

"Well, I'd give that then."

The drowning of Wesley Binford was a nine



days' wonder in Oakwood. There were the usual timely admonitions that one should never go out in a canoe without knowing how to swim. The local newspaper insisted that the Boat Club ought to be public-spirited enough to have the Perch Hole cleaned out. For a short while, if a fellow wanted to take a girl canoeing, he encountered parental objections, but you cannot stop canoeing because a person drowns any more than you can stop railroad travel because of a fatal collision, and the advancing spring found the river dotted with lolling couples, who spoke of the treacherous Perch Hole as they steered, with extra care, through its hidden perils.

Either Marjorie Danforth was extremely reckless of her life, or else she had unbounded confidence in Harry's skill and knowledge of the river, for in that little interval of play-time for him, which was to end all too soon, they were seen together on the river nearly every day, and she was content to recline against the "lazy-back" unafraid to let him pick his way around the fatal bend in the darkness, on the dangers of a half tide. It was many an ice cream cone they had at Sparrow's in that early springtide which was too good to last. When Harry asked Brick Parks if he might use his canoe, Brick threw a full bailing sponge at him for asking foolish questions—and besides there was Gordon's canoe always at his service.

Whatever lingering hope Mr. Binford had that



his son might have clambered ashore somehow, was completely dissipated by that "astute" county official, Detective Blauvelt, who had examined the scene of the accident at the father's request. As a rule, a fugitive is kind enough to leave a footprint or two and a torn fragment of some garment on a bramble-bush, or at least, a pocket handkerchief with an initial on it, and when Detective Blauvelt's trained and searching eye failed to uncover any such conclusive souvenir, his scientific mind naturally deduced that the boy had been drowned. Harry had been up to the Binford cottage to tell Wesley's father of his conviction that the son was alive, but there, as everywhere else, the theory of the official tracker and deducer had been accepted and how should the conclusions of a mere amateur, and a boy, prevail against a three-thousand-dollar-a-year sleuth?

His call at the cottage was not altogether pleasant, for he found Mr. Binford a cold, unresponsive sort of man who received his expression of opinion with a very slight, ironic smile and told him to buy a new canoe and let him know what it cost. He knew that the Arnolds, who lived in the big, old-fashioned house, were rich.

But the great sleuth himself did have a kind word for Harry, for one day he met young Dr. Brent, the boys' scout-master, on the Court House steps.



"That Arnold boy is quite a wide-awake young fellow," he said, "and bright, too; only trouble is he's been reading fool detective stories."

"On the contrary, he doesn't care for detective stories at all," said the doctor, promptly, "but he has read a great many books on the subject of motor-boats, and gas engine principles; you'll find him exceptionally well-posted on that subject."

"Well," said Detective Blauvelt, "I never took much interest in machinery."

"No, I thought as much," retorted the doctor, dryly.

When day followed day, and still there was no sign of Wesley, the truth of Mr. Blauvelt's conclusions seemed doubly confirmed, and if people refrained from saying that he had been sometimes mean and always selfish, that he thought only of himself, if they ceased to speak of his silly pose of sportiness, as laughable or sickening, it was for the same reason that Wesley himself had given Sparrow in magnanimously declining to comment on Oakwood — because they did not wish to speak disrespectfully of the dead.

At last, there came a day when Marjorie and Harry went canoeing together for the last time. She was leaning against the "lazy-back," surrounded by cushions, her pretty feet crossed in the bottom of the canoe, and he was leaning forward talking with her and letting the paddle drip.



"Mean?" he queried, "no, I think the meanest thing he ever did was not to leave half his coat caught on a brier-tree for Detective Blauvelt; that *was* thoughtless!"

"You still think he's alive?" she asked, skepticism in her big eyes.

"Sure, I do."

"Then you don't mind my saying what I think?"

"No, only you're wrong, Marje."

"Do you think he would be capable of ever making a real sacrifice for any one?"

"There you go again, talking of what he *might* do or *would* do. Girls have 'supreme sacrifices' on the brain."

"You're always defending him."

"No, I'm not, Marje."

"He never thought of anybody but himself; he wouldn't turn aside in the street to let an old lady pass."

There was a moment's silence.

"Marje, has your class begun on Froude's History yet?"

"Yes, and I loathe it."

"Well, do you remember that fellow — one of those martyrs? He could march right up and let himself be tied to the stake and roasted, and he never made a sound, but three weeks before he shrieked like a baby when he had a toothache in London Tower."



"And the moral of that is?" she asked, teasingly.

"Nothing, only it seems to me that a person is either big or little, but usually not both. He may be a coward in little things; but a hero in big things. They say General Grant was afraid to fight when he was a boy."

"I'd prefer to judge people by what I see them do," said the girl. "If a person is selfish, he's selfish, that's all. Wesley Binford couldn't make a big sacrifice because he couldn't make a little one."

"How about Froude—and that martyr fellow?"

"I told you I *abominate* Froude, and I didn't come out for a history lesson!"

"How about an ice cream cone?"

She smiled half shamefacedly at her little outburst.

"That sounds better," she said.

So Harry plunged his dripping paddle and started up the river.

Perhaps she was right, that the little things make the big things, just as the pennies make the dollars, and that the little things are a safe standard by which to judge. And I'm afraid it was true that Wesley Binford had expected the world to stand aside and let him pass.

But how about that fellow, the martyr?



That night Marjorie Danforth met Harry's sister, Margaret. "Isn't it perfectly lovely," said she, "you *can't* get him to say a *word* against Wesley, his friend!"

"They weren't friends," said Margaret, "they hardly ever saw each other."

So the days flew by till finally Gordon came to scout meeting one night, bringing a letter for Harry, with the imprint, *Bureau of Standards, Washington, D. C.*, in the corner.

"Before you open it, Harry — here, give me that back — not till you hear what I've got to say — now listen, and everybody here be a witness! If you go out west, Harry — now mind, I'm saying this even before you open that letter — if you go out west, Harry, I'm coming to join you before you come home and there's no use in denying it because I've got a president —"

"You mean a secretary of state," interrupted Brick Parks.

"Precedent?" suggested Dr. Brent.

"Yes, I've got a precedent, because I went to Panama when everybody said I wouldn't — and that's a precedent — something that happens before something else to prove the other thing by the thing that happened before it. I'll think up a way all right!"

"Please may I read the letter now, Kid?" said Harry.



The boys crowded about, looking over Harry's shoulder while he read the long-looked-for letter from his genial and kindly friend, Gordon's uncle, whom he had met while working at Panama.

"DEAR HARRY:—

"I hope you will not think I have forgotten you, but the mills of Uncle Sam grind slowly, and you know he's a finnick old bachelor about some things —"

("Isn't my uncle a dandy, Harry? He —"

"Keep still, will you?")

"a finnick old bachelor about some things. Yesterday I had a talk with Mr. Dalton who is connected with the Geological Survey, one of the Bureaus of the Interior Department. He has just returned from Montana and was very enthusiastic over the work which is being done there by the Reclamation Service, another branch of the same department. These two bureaus are working more or less in conjunction on the great conservation projects which are being carried on there. He was telling me of the great artificial storage lake which they are making in the mountains to gather flood waters, and of the great dam they are throwing up.

"By the merest chance, he mentioned his annoyance that the government had 'copped,' as he ex-



pressed it, one of the young men who was most valuable in excavation work. The young man in question was with a party doing topographical work in New York and was about to start west when he was transferred to irrigation work somewhere. Instantly I thought of you. I told him of your work at Panama — that excavation was in fact your middle name, as I believe Gordon would say —”

(“He’s all right, isn’t he, Harry! He —”

“Shut up! Where was I? Oh, yes —”)

“as Gordon would say; that you had worked in the ‘ditch’ on one of the record-breaking shovels —”

(“That’s true, you did, Harry!”)

“and that your name was on the Civil Service list, though not near the top. He said it made no difference where it was as long as it was there, that if you worked on the ‘ditch’ and had a good record for excavation work, he wanted you and that he’d see you got a certificate of appointment *immediately*. It’s quite a thing for Uncle Sam to do *anything immediately*, Harry —”

(“That’s a good rap —”

“Will you keep still one minute?”

“Sure.”)



"This morning I had him on the 'phone and he said that your certificate had started and that you were ordered to report in Washington forthwith. They are, as I understood him, hurrying to get this work finished so as to catch the bulk of this year's wild water, and then he thinks they can use you down the Mississippi —"

("In the path of La Salle, Harry!" shouted Gordon.

"La Salle, who's he?" asked Til Morrell.

"He explored the Mississippi River," said Gordon, contemptuously. "He was a chiffonier —"

"A roll-top desk," said Brick Parks.

"You mean a piano-stool," said Ray Carpenter.

"He was a hat-rack," said Pierce.

"Can I finish this letter?" asked Harry.

"Who's stopping you?" demanded Gordon.

"Maybe, he was a chevalier," suggested Dr. Brent, quietly; "let us hear the rest, Harry boy.")

"Be sure to stop in and see me while you are here, and congratulations and all good wishes until then.

"Your friend,

E. C. HOWELL."

And so it came to pass that another one of Oakwood's boys left the town in that pleasant spring-time, and went forth with good wishes and flatter-



ing predictions, with every breeze blowing in his favor (as was no more than right), to challenge mountains and valleys and throw down the gauntlet to great rivers in the name of Uncle Sam.



## CHAPTER IX

### HARRY HEARS OF THE LOST CACHE

“WELL, well, *well!*”

The cordiality seemed to roll up, exploding the final “Well” in a hospitable burst.

“Harry, my boy, I’m delighted to see you — it seems like old times — like, eh, like — as our old friend, Mr. Carleton Conne, would say — like meeting a long-lost brother. Sit right down here, my boy! When did you reach Washington?”

If Harry had not been already radiant with happiness, the mention of Carleton Conne would have sufficed to put him in good humor. But he was radiant. And he sank into a chair in Mr. Howell’s hotel room, panting, partly from fatigue and partly from very excess of joyousness and enthusiasm. Mr. Howell rubbed his shiny bald head and contemplated him smilingly.

“’Bout noon,” panted Harry. “I’ve been tramping through the musty halls of that old Hooe Building all afternoon.”

“And is everything all right?”

“Everything’s fine and dandy — with something left over. I’m all signed and countersigned and ready for Montana.”



"Fine! You saw Dalton?"

"Saw Mr. Dalton — he said I was just the fellow they wanted."

"Good!"

"And I'm starting to-night — sleeper — twelve-thirty."

"Well, well!"

"Going to be a straddler for the present. Mr. Dalton introduced me to a gentleman — Elting — who is in the Survey —"

"I know him."

"And he says I'll have to handle the field sheets — they're doing a lot of contour work in the Gulch; then I had to go over to the R.S.— that's Reclamation Service —"

"Yes, I know," laughed Mr. Howell.

"And there they told me what I'll probably have to do on the storage lake work — so I'm to be charged up half to R.S. and half to G.S.— but it's all really one. I may circle up cracks and mark stones for the crown-work, and they may let me look after some of the grouting, too. It's an arch dam, you know, and where there's arch action —" He stopped short as Mr. Howell smiled broadly. "I forgot," he concluded sheepishly, "that *you're* an engineer."

"That's all right, my boy, I'm glad to see you so interested."

"One thing I'm pretty sure about," Harry went



on, "is excavation work. We talked about some ditches and things and Mr. Dalton wrote a letter to the Gulch about it." He glanced at an open grip which lay on the table. "You going away yourself, Mr. Howell?"

"Starting to-morrow."

"Strains and pressures?" the boy asked, mischievously.

"Strains and pressures; so you remember that, eh?"

Mr. Howell was connected with the United States Bureau of Standards, and his business was to travel about the country making scientific tests which the boys had never been able to comprehend. And, following Gordon's example, they had made a practice of speaking playfully of strains, pressures and so forth, much to Mr. Howell's amusement.

"Yes, I'm testing a bridge near Chicago and some steel construction work in La Salle, then down to St. Louis for a few weeks with the folks."

"Speaking of La Salle," laughed Harry, "reminds me of Gordon; he's threatening to dog my footsteps again."

Mr. Howell laughed. "The boys are hoping to have him in St. Louis for a spell this summer."

"And how are the boys?"

"Fine — never tired of talking of Panama and of you and Mr. Conne. What a way he did have with boys, Harry!"



"Yes," Harry mused; "it seems to me one bad thing about traveling is that you meet people whom you like, but whom you'll never see again. I dare say, Mr. Conne and his friends are in South Africa now, or maybe Labrador, or Alaska, 'filming up,' as he used to call it. Probably I'll never see him again. I often think of him and that funny way he had."

They sat in silence for a moment, Mr. Howell smiling pleasantly, and Harry thinking half-regretfully of those two years at Panama and of his erstwhile friend, the motion-picture man. Then, as if suddenly recalled to the present, he said,

"Oh, by the way, Mr. Howell, you know every one in the scientific service, tell me about Captain Craig. He's the one I have to report to in the Gulch."

"Tell you about him!" laughed Mr. Howell. "Why, what makes you think there is anything to tell about him?"

"I notice *you're* laughing," Harry ventured.

"What have you been hearing about him?" Mr. Howell asked slyly.

"Oh, nothing in particular, but over at the Survey they mentioned his name more or less. Mr. Dalton said something to another man about handling the captain with a pair of tongs, and another fellow — a draftsman — who mentioned him said that if you're going to 'set him' it's best to use a long fuse."



Mr. Howell leaned back and laughed heartily.

"I guess he's a good engineer from the way they spoke," Harry added.

"He is a *remarkable* engineer," said Mr. Howell, soberly; "he is a genius."

"Is he in full charge out there?"

"I think he is there at present more in an advisory capacity — but of that I'm not sure. It was he who made the reconnoissance survey of the Gulch and the whole drainage area. I suspect he had a good deal to do with planning the dam, too. He's a wonderful man."

Still Mr. Howell smiled meditatively, as if secretly amused.

"Yes, the captain is a wonderful man," he went on; "a wonderful engineer, and a great personality. You'll like him."

"Everybody seems to feel that way," said Harry, "but they seem to smile, just as you do, when they speak of him, and somehow, I don't just know why, I'm curious about him. They spoke of half a dozen engineers, but somehow, I seem to know him — or kind of feel him, as you might say — already."

"That's what I mean by *personality*, Harry; it spreads, you know, something like a contagion."

"Is there anything special about him?"

"Well, I'll tell you," said Mr. Howell, rather more seriously, "the captain is the 'stormy petrel'



of the service. He's first of all an army man, you know, and he has a touch of the same trait that General Grant had, and General Sherman. He thinks of Washington as a group of politicians. He's always being fretted by the red tape of the official system. He's essentially a field man — a man of action. When he wants a thing, he wants it, and he thinks that the man off on the spot is the best judge. Usually, his little tiffs with Congress or 'the Office' are more amusing than anything else, and very often he carries the day.

"There are some who will tell you that he oversteps his authority at times, though not often, I suspect. When he was planning the irrigation system down in Texas, he ousted some trespassing mill-owners who were using government water, and there was a good deal of talk and fuss here about it's being high-handed. He's pretty decisive — the captain.

"You know, Harry, Uncle Sam says not only that a thing must be made right, but that it must be made right *in the right way*. These people who work indoors, who make laws and rules, and keep books and records, they're apt to be looked on as a stumbling-block by the men off in the fields. But that isn't quite fair. Everything has to be done according to rule and system, you know. And sometimes a good rule or a good system causes delay or hardship or, it may be, a little individual



injustice somewhere. The man in the field is apt to think only of his own immediate interest.— But I dare say, the captain's little war with officialdom is more a joke than anything else. He's very highly esteemed and very valuable. You'll like him, Harry."

"I bet I will," said Harry. "I like him already."

"He's especially popular with the young fellows out in the field. Let me see your certificate, my boy; you say you report to him? Well, that's fine and I congratulate you. You'll utilize your drafting some also—that will be good practice. I see they mention your work at Panama. That will please the captain; he believes in practical beginnings."

"And I must thank you for what you've done for me, Mr. Howell; I guess they wouldn't have reached my name for several years if it hadn't been for you and Mr. Dalton."

Mr. Howell said nothing, only beamed approvingly at Harry, enjoying his high hopes and contagious enthusiasm.

"When the lake gets to filling and they know everything is all right," said Harry, "we're coming down the Missouri, surveying and revetting, and strike the Mississippi—that's the 'Old Lady,' you know—before the Ohio gets busy. There's a lot of levee work down below Cairo."



“So you’re going to meet the ‘Old Lady’?”

“Hope to — before she runs away with much more terra firma. They say they’ll get her into a straight-jacket some day; so you see, I’ve got my work cut out for me.”

Mr. Howell fell to gazing at the boy again, pleasantly, wistfully, as if he wished he might change places with him.

“Harry,” he said, meditatively, “did you ever read anything about Lewis and Clarke? You’re going right out into the Lewis and Clarke country, my boy, where they had their chief adventures. One of their camping spots is within half a dozen miles of the Gulch. And there’s an old cache which they dug and stocked with goods somewhere out there, and were never able to find on their journey back.— You know what a cache is, don’t you, Harry?”

“It’s a hole, or some kind of a hiding-place made in the wilderness to store goods, isn’t it? I read about Peary leaving things in caches for those who were to come after him, or for his own return trip.”

“Yes,” said Mr. Howell, “and it seems funny to me to think of their being some place in the wilderness where goods were stored, and of no human being knowing where it is. I’ve been reading about Lewis and Clarke lately and from all I can see, their Christian name, as you would say, Harry, — their Christian name was ‘Adventure.’”



"Their middle name, if you want to get it just right," Harry laughed.

Mr. Howell's heroic efforts to master and adopt the boys' vocabulary were amusing, and sometimes, taken in conjunction with his rotund form and bald head, almost touching.

"Is that a Great Northern time-table you've got there, Harry? Let's see if it has a map — yes, a good one. Well, now, see here — Is there time?" he bethought him, suddenly.

"Oh, yes, piles of it," said Harry; "go on, tell me all about it, Mr. Howell; I don't have to leave till half past twelve, anyway."

It was from the map in this time-table that Harry had his first glimpse of the locality into which his new position was to take him. Following the pencil which Mr. Howell held, he traced the great Missouri from its confluence with the Mississippi, near St. Louis, backward along its pathway through the vast west.

Mr. Howell's pencil point finally rested on a spot among the Rocky Mountains in the southwestern part of Montana.

"And there's her beginning," said he; "that's where she trickles down, just an insignificant little dribble, out of the mountains, and by the time that little trickle reaches the sea it has crossed or passed thirteen states!"

Harry shook his head in silent wonder. "I



always thought the Hudson was a pretty big river," said he, "but this — I never realized it. They'd have some job accommodating a river like that in England, wouldn't they?"

"It would have to be rolled up like a main-spring," said Mr. Howell. "Well, now, Harry, see here; *there's* where the Gulch is, just about there. I'm not going to tell you anything about the Gulch because you'll find out all that when you get there, but you notice it isn't on the Missouri, Harry?"

His pencil point was resting on a spot in northern Montana where the great Missouri seemed to divide into two streams. One branch went north, the other in a southwesterly direction. All along the great river's course, as Harry could see, small tributary streams flowed into it, but here it seemed to divide and he could not, for the life of him, decide which was the Missouri River, except for Mr. Howell's remark. The Gulch, which was to be the scene of his labors in the immediate future, evidently lay along the course of the northerly stream, but very close to its confluence with the other.

"Now, Harry," said Mr. Howell, folding the time-table and handing it back to him, "I'll tell you how Marias River came by its name, and who knows but some day you may root out the lost cache, what with your woods lore and scouting wisdom?"



“And if I should —” laughed Harry.

“Why, then you’d be a better scout than Captain Clarke, and you’d find some very valuable mementoes, Indian clothing, specimens of plants and the like — the Smithsonian Institute can show you a list of them.”

“I’m afraid I won’t have much time for cache-hunting,” said Harry; “but tell me about Lewis and Clarke, Mr. Howell; all I know is that they were the first to cross the continent.”

“They were that, Harry, with — with a considerable surplus.”

“With something left over, Mr. Howell?” laughed the boy, as he curled up on the sofa, his arms over his knees in characteristic fashion.

“Well, my boy, it begins with Napoleon Bonaparte wanting money. Thomas Jefferson was president then and pretty nearly every school-boy knows how he struck a bargain with Napoleon for most of the land west of the Mississippi River. In a word, Uncle Sam bought the Great West for fifteen million dollars. That was about eighteen hundred and four, you know. A good many people thought it was buying a pig in a poke, for nothing was known of the far west then. So President Jefferson conceived the notion that having bought that vast tract it might be a good idea to take a peep into it and see what it contained. And that’s how he happened to select Lewis and Clarke, two



young army captains, to ascend the great Missouri River, cross the Rockies and descend the Columbia to the Pacific, on the other side. And they did it. It was a great exploit, Harry. But this is the point.

“In the course of their long journey up the Missouri, they finally, after many months, reached the spot where you will be in three or four days. Just think of that! A year and a half to make a trip that you’ll make in less than a week! Well, they reached the parting of the ways — those two rivers — and they couldn’t decide which was the Missouri. And it was an important matter, for only by following the right river could they hope to find a pass through the mountains and strike the headwaters of the Columbia.

“Captain Lewis felt (as we are all of us apt to feel) that whichever way they took would prove to be the wrong one. So they divided their little party (there were twenty or thirty of them) into halves, each half to explore a branch, and to meet again at the same spot several days later and consider which branch they had better follow. The northern river was explored for some miles by Captain Clarke and it gave him so much trouble and perplexity, what with its baffling turns and dizzy banks, that he named it after a young lady acquaintance of his in Virginia, who had caused him much perplexity and many sleepless nights, and



it continues to be called Maria's River to this very day. It was following that stream that he passed through a deep valley, and all but lost his life by a fall from a cliff. That same valley, Harry, they now call Long Gulch, and it is by damming that up that the government is preparing to hold in check all the wild water<sup>1</sup> of that vast drainage area to prevent floods in the flood season, to furnish water in the dry season, and to irrigate great tracts of land.

"But this is what none of them out there seem to think of, Harry, that when the famous Lewis and Clarke party reunited at the confluence of those two rivers, just a little way below the Gulch, they camped for a while, and when they left they deposited many of the specimens they had collected, plants, Indian trophies, and clothing, and no end of interesting and valuable things, intending to unearth them on the journey back. And there they are yet, Harry, for all the world knows, for Lewis and Clarke couldn't for the lives of them find that particular cache.

"So that is the story of the lost cache, and some Sunday afternoon you must take a stroll down the river and see if you can find it," laughed Mr. Howell; "for you know there's always a way, Harry."

<sup>1</sup> Water flowing from hills and mountains as the result of melting ice and snow, and having no regular channels is known as wild water.



“Yes,” said Harry, laughing and rising to go; “that’s Gordon’s expression,—but that’s a mighty interesting thing, Mr. Howell, when you come to think of it.”

“Of course, it is,” said Mr. Howell, cordially, “that’s why I told you about it.—Have you time to catch your train? Oh, yes, nearly an hour to spare.”

Harry had never before passed the night in a Pullman car and he was a long while getting to sleep. Outside on the dim platform, he could hear the occasional rolling of a hand-truck, and beyond the plush curtain, in the aisle of the car, there was the muffled tread of passengers coming in to their berths, the asking and answering of questions about tickets, breakfast, shines, stops, and through all, the modulated, respectful voice of the porter. Once or twice, he dozed, only to be startled into consciousness by some noisy arrival, the thud of a heavy grip on the car-floor, or perchance, that unmistakable, familiar sound, the falling of a shoe.

Once he was vaguely conscious of a voice saying something about dynamite — destroying a dam by dynamite; but he was not certain where the voice came from nor just what was said. Later, when he recollected that it had not startled him, or seemed at all unusual, he decided that he must have dreamed it.



Then, pretty soon, some one said something, or he *thought* that some one said something, which caused him to sit up in his berth and rub his eyes. He thought it came from the station platform.

"All that Indian business is in the cache," it said.

Then, suddenly, there was a bump as the engine backed up to the train, and Harry's head, out of sympathy, bumped into the woodwork behind him.

"Ouch!" said he.

He lay down again and presently the train rolled softly off into the night and Harry rolled softly off into a strange, shadowy land which was neither wakefulness nor sleep. It was that delicious half-consciousness, imparted by the gently-rolling sleeping-car, and it conjured up in his languid mind a sort of jumble of all he had been talking of and listening to that evening. As usual in such a state, disconnected odds and ends of what had been said seemed to float before him without any particular meaning. He wondered what Mr. Howell had meant by calling Captain Craig a "stormy petrel." He would hunt up stormy petrel. He began to picture Captain Craig to himself, his manner, his physique, his voice . . . He was conscious of a certain charm which that little dash of insubordination (or what he fancied to be insubordination) gave the captain. For Harry was an out-and-out boy, when you come right down to it.



In his half-sleep he wondered what Mr. Howell had meant by saying that a good system might cause individual injustice. Could any kind of injustice be good? But Mr. Howell had not said it was good; he had merely said . . . Then he wondered whether it could possibly have been *ham* instead of *dam* that the voice had mentioned. But what an idea, to blow up a ham by dynamite. . . . He wondered who in the world could have made that remark about the cache. Strange, that two people in the same city should be using that same word. . . . Why no, nothing so strange about that. . . . Then he decided that it *was* strange, then that it wasn't, then that it was, and then . . .

Then, all of a sudden, it was broad daylight.

But we are not to accompany Harry on his trip across the continent. Instead, we must go back for several weeks and follow events which were taking place elsewhere while he was still enjoying that fleeting springtime in Oakwood.



## CHAPTER X

### “QUERY”

IT was while the train which bore him across the continent was passing through the Bad Lands of Dakota, that Wesley Binford began that celebrated career of question-asking which was to win him both a position and a nickname, and which came perilously near to taking the place of a college education. I do not say that it took the place of a college education, but it came within an inch and a quarter of it. Even now, if you could get hold of Captain Craig (which might be difficult), he would throw his two arms into the air in a kind of good-humored despair and confess, as he confessed to Field Geographer Slade, in the Gulch, that never, *never* had he stood before such a fusillade as that discharged by the inquisitorial batteries of his young raw recruit. And he had been in the trenches at Santiago.

“Captain,” said Wesley, dropping into the seat beside him, “may I ask you a question?”

“Shoot,” said the captain.

“Well, this is what I can’t understand; how can



we prevent floods and things on the Mississippi River by going out to Montana?"

"Where's Bobby, Wesley?"

"He's in the smoking-room talking with some men."

"He isn't playing his harmonica, is he?"

"No," laughed Wesley. "Of course, I understand that the Gulch lake will be good for irrigation, but I should think we would have stayed at the Mississippi and done whatever —"

"Wesley, don't you want to get me another pillow out of my berth? I can't seem to get my head comfortable here."

He was sunken far down on the seat, the back of his head already buried in one pillow, and his mind buried in a perfect carnival of figures which disported themselves on the margins of a time-table, a used envelope, and even dimly upon the waxy surface of a paper drinking-cup. No available scrap had escaped, and they were marshaled along the window-sill and on the plush seat opposite. For two days he had been thus dead to the world.

Time was when Wesley would have felt it beneath his dignity to do such little personal services. Perhaps even now if the request had come from another source, he would not have been quite so ready to comply, but his admiration for Captain Craig was fast approaching hero-worship. Somehow the captain's informal manner of comradeship



gave him the impression that he was beginning to be really liked. There was something about the captain which made it easy to be familiar with him, but which effectually precluded undue freedom. And there was no doubt that the captain was watching the new boy's sprouting interest in Uncle Sam's big conservation enterprises, with amused approval. He had not expected it in such heroic doses. With Bobby Cullen, who was a sort of privileged character, there seemed to be a mutual understanding that he and the captain should make game of each other's foibles, and Wesley found himself cautiously venturing into this mischievous custom.

When he came back with the pillow, he put it down behind the captain's head, then offered him a canceled postage stamp and asked whether it mightn't be useful for more figures, for it was a great joke with Bob and Wesley that the captain positively refused to figure on respectable sheets of paper.

Captain Craig laughed heartily. "What was that last one, Wesley?"

"About going out to Montana to fight the Mississippi."

"Oh yes; well, now, if you were a general and there was a war, what would be the first thing to do? Do you know?"

"N-no, sir."



"To cut off your enemy's base of supplies, Wesley. Now you go and sit down over there and think that over and see what you make of it."

"Thank you," said Wesley.

The captain poised his fountain pen.

"Any others just now?"

"N-no, sir," said the boy, blushing a trifle; "I'm sorry to have trou—"

"No trouble at all, Wesley; that's the way to learn."

"Well, we'll be there to-morrow, anyway."

"That's what we will."

The boy hesitated. "Whatever I do, Captain, I hope I'll be — be under you."

"That's my idea, Wesley, to have an eye out for you. And I mean to fix it so you and Bobby can bunk together. How does that strike you?"

"Great — fine!"

He had been meaning for two days past to ask the captain this question. He knew that he was to be only "common help," and he feared that he might be lost in the shuffle and lose track of his benefactor.

When he sat down and began to think he saw what the captain meant by cutting off an enemy's base of supplies, and it was borne in upon him what a stupendous business was this task of conservation which embraced the whole wide country in its well-ordered scheme, which marshaled trickling



mountain streams, wrenching their united power from them to turn the wheels of manufacture; which was changing deserts into billowed seas of wheat and corn, and throttling and imprisoning the wild waters of the West before they could devastate the East. It is doubtful if Wesley had ever felt proud of anything or anybody except Wesley Binford. But now he began to feel proud of the government which could originate these gigantic strategies to circumvent and checkmate Nature, of Uncle Sam who knew how to set his great house in order. There was something so big, so audacious, about it all! — That was what he made of it.

As he glanced across the aisle at that comparatively young man, up to his ears in figures and with no weapon but a fountain-pen, he thought (oh, but he was thinking these days!) how Captain Craig regarded our whole vast country as a colossal game-board, where the works of Nature could be moved about and rearranged, and he marveled then (and he marveled more afterward) that mountains and cañons, and rivers and falls and valleys should be so amenable and that men should be so strong.

On the whole, he was glad that he was not working for the Forbes Perfumery Company, even on the liberal basis of Saturday afternoons all the year round. He was a little ashamed that he had ever thought of Saturday afternoons in connection with his life's work. He was sorry he had spoken so



to Sparrow. But he was glad to reflect that it had been to Sparrow and not to Captain Craig. . . .

At about noon next day the train stopped at a little shack, a mere shed enclosed on all sides except the one facing the rails, before which there was a small platform. On a rough board, in rougher letters, was printed, GULCH STATION, U.S.A., but whether the capitals meant that it belonged to the United States or were intended to reassure skeptical arrivals that it was *in* the United States, Wesley did not know. It seemed incredible that he could have traveled so far and still be in the United States. For the whole previous day they had been rattling across prairie lands, then a lonely tree had presented itself, then another, and then they had grown quite bold, appearing in little groups, until here at last they had courageously mustered themselves into an exceptionally large grove or a miniature forest, whichever you chose to call it. And in the grateful shade of this surrounding growth, isolated and remote, stood Gulch Station.

There was no Gulch Station on the time-table; it seemed wholly undignified for a great, thundering train to stop here, but stop it did and as Wesley alighted he saw a big wagon, with stout, heavy-tired wheels, and a team of husky-looking horses, waiting. It had an arching canvas cover, which



looked to Wesley like the spray-hood of a motor-boat, and on its seat were two men, one a young fellow in a belted khaki suit, who wore spectacles, and the other a burly man of perhaps thirty or more, in flannel shirt and overalls, who wore a felt slouch hat with ventilation holes cut in it regardless of pattern or order. It was also ostentatiously decorated with round celluloid pins of the campaign variety, advertising various kinds of tobacco, silver polish, and so forth. In his mouth was a corn-cob pipe, upside down. He was the first to speak.

"Hulloa, Cap'n, and t'same ter you, Bobby; did ye fetch me accordia?"

"Oi did thot!" mocked Bobby.

"Is there anny moore o' thim bags, Cap'n?"

"Just these," said the captain, indicating about a dozen canvas bags which the baggage man had thrown upon a little pile of similar ones, already on the platform. "How are you, Mike? Well, Bert, how are things? It's good to see you.—Here, Wesley, this is Mr. Walters, who's on the map work. Bert, I want you to know Wesley Binford; he's going to help us out. Shake hands with him, Mike; this is the Honorable M. Kerrigan, Wesley, leader of the Gulch band."

The train pulled slowly off, the fireman waved his hand to the little party, the slow, strained puffing became rapid and regular, and there was a certain sense of loneliness imparted to Wesley by the





"THEN, AMID RISING CLOUDS OF BROWN DUST, HE HURLED THE LADEN BAGS, ONE AFTER ANOTHER, INTO THE WAGON."







diminishing rear platform of the last car. And yet miles and miles of country would that train cover and still be in the United States.

The "Honorable M. Kerrigan" came out of the wagon, took an enormous bandanna handkerchief from his pocket and tied it around the lower part of his head in such a way as to cover his nose and mouth. Then, amid rising clouds of brown dust, he hurled the laden bags, one after another, into the wagon.

"Why does he do that, Bob?" asked Wesley.

"Because he doesn't want to have his stomach lined with concrete."

Then Wesley realized that the bags contained cement, in powder form, and that the addition of a little moisture to this in the human system might have dangerous results.

"An' if Oi did hev it lined wid concrete it ud be a good thing in *your* camp."

This was a slur at Bobby's culinary accomplishments and he did not let it pass unnoticed.

"Did you hear the latest from Washington, Mike? That they're going to take all the Irish away from the Gulch?"

"They'll hev ter take the Cap'n thin — he's Irish."

"So, Captain?" ventured Wesley.

"I'm about one-third Irish," said the captain, taking a hand in the bag-throwing.



"An' thot's the thirrd thut counts," said Kerigan; "here's the last wan, and oop she goes!"

When they had all piled into the wagon, the old-established war between Mike and Bobby proceeded in real earnest.

"Wall, how's the East coomin' along?"

"'Tisn't coming along; we left it behind."

"I see ye're jist as fresh as iver.—How much do Oi owe ye fer th' accordia?"

"Oh, I got it cheap — bought it from an Italian."

"A *fwhat?*"

"A Dutchman — he was half Dutch and half Italian; he said the Irish —"

"How much wuz it?"

He took a rawhide wallet from his pocket and proceeded to pay Bobby the just debt of two dollars and fifty cents.

"And what are you doing to jolly Uncle Sam into paying you these days, Mike?"

"Oi'm not thravellin' all oover the counthry, but here attendin' to me worrk. Ye wuz oop thim Jersey rivers, I hear."

"We lined up the Raritan and the Passaic in —"

"Ya-as; wall, ye'll hev ter settle down now ter *reel* worrk, Oi'm thinkin'. Ye can't go flirtin' wid th' Mississouri in anny sich way."

"But what do you chore at when you *do* work, Mike?"



"G'lang," said Mike to the horses.

"Of course, you work, *sometimes*."

"Oi've been worrkin' enuff to upset some o' yur precious contour lines fer ye — Oi kin tell ye thot."

"They still let you bunk in Cabin X?"

"Who'll put me out? — G'lang!"

"I thought Jan might."

"Thot Swade!"

"You see, Mike, those Swedes have heavy work to do and they need their sleep."

"The's not wan o' thim kin loop a stump."

"You don't mean to tell me you're still drawing stumps? Why, I thought you'd have that done two months ago."

This was too much for Mike and he embraced the occasion which Wesley offered by asking a question, to vent his scorn.

"What does drawing stumps mean?" Wesley asked innocently.

Kerrigan, half turning, apparently addressed him.

"Ther' is soom people thinks ye kin make a storage lake wid fountain-pens an' ivory roolers six inches long an' blue paper an' sich like —"

Captain Craig began to laugh silently. He enjoyed Mike immensely and the Irishman's opinions on engineering feats were as famous as those of the captain himself — in a way.

"'Twas th' same down at Panamar. T' Ould Man wuz all roight ter guvern, but who wuz it ter



haul off an' give th' face uv Naturre an upperr-cut —"

"That was you, Mike," said Bobby.

"Wall, yoong feller," he continued, at Wesley, "'tis loike th' Duke uv Yorrkshire out here in th' Gulch — him that marrched his men oop th' hill jist so's to marrch thim down agin. Ther' is half uv us cuttin' down trees and th' other half plantin' new wans."

The captain chuckled again and winked at Wesley.

"Mebbe they'll git it to suit soom day — G'lang!"

"You didn't tell him what looping a stump is," said the captain.

"Wall," said Mike, "ye can't troost anny o' thim L.H.'s <sup>1</sup> to loop a stoomp. It looks aisy loike, but ye hev ter hev a Civil Service man."

"You just *have* to," said Bobby, mischievously.

"Are you a Civil Service man?" Wesley asked, innocently.

"*Fwhat!*" said Mike, amid general laughter. "Oi've had me certificate this eight monts — ivver sence Oi left t' ditch."

"Mike's got a life contract with Uncle Sam," said Walters.

"G'lang," said Mike, with an air of solemn triumph. "Wall," he continued to Wesley, "ye hev

<sup>1</sup> Local help.



ter pull oot the stoomps, roots and all; they do that wid a windlass an' this same team, an' ye've got ter loop the stomp so's th' chain'll hold — it looks aisy."

"But don't be deceived," said Bobby.

"Oi'll show ye," said Mike, "you coom up by East Hill."

"I will, Mi— Mr. Kerrigan, if I get a chance," said Wesley.

"Ye're a C.S.,"<sup>2</sup> said Mike, as if that were a settled matter.

"N-no, I'm not," said Wesley.

The captain sobered up and spoke to Walters. To Wesley it seemed as if Mike's mention of East Hill had suggested the question.

"How about that erosion over there?" he asked.

"It's pretty bad," said Walters.

"The Forestry people doing anything?"

"They've set up a couple of thousand saplings — about covered the slope. They say the erosion is up to us."

The captain whistled to himself. "I suppose it is," said he. "Any water coming down?"

"A little — but it's a late season, Captain, that's one good thing. We took the contours over there last week and there's a lot of silt coming down."

"Hmm — that'll have to be looked into."

"Have to be deflected, I suppose?"

<sup>2</sup> Civil Service.



"Yes, I'll look it over to-morrow."

"Fwhat ye want fer that," said Mike, spitting out of the wagon, "is soom o' thim drain ditch people frum Panamar."

"Did you hear anything about sending some of that excavation crowd out here?" asked Walter.

"I wasn't in Washington. They sent Mack off on irrigation — he would have been just the one."

"I thought you had him nailed down, Captain," said Walter.

"I thought so, too," said the captain, dryly. "Anybody arching?"

"I haven't been below the dam in a week," answered Walters.

Of course, this was all Greek to Wesley, and it discouraged him to hear this technical shop-talk and to think how hard he would have to study to understand it. It was disheartening — like beginning to study algebra. Yet Mike evidently understood it, so why should not he? At all events, he had brought with him that faithful friend in need, his tongue.

"What is erosion, Captain?"

Mike looked around and winked at Walters. Wesley had a vague feeling that they were laughing at him.

"It's the action of water on loose land," said the captain. "You see, if water passes over land which isn't held compact by roots, the land will be



washed away, and that washing away is called erosion."

"An' when it gits into the water they call it silt," volunteered Mike.

"Thank you," said Wesley.

"Not at ahl," said Mike, as if he had given all the information.

"So now ye'll know if ye root away a tree frum a hillside, 'tis t' same as throwin' mud in a river. Ye know 'tis th' straw that holds bricks together, don't ye? Wall, 'tis th' same wid land."

"And deflection?" Wesley asked, hesitatingly.

"Deflection, Mr. Query," said Mike, "is t' make the water tak' a lang cut roond."

"Till the young trees are well started," added Walters.

"Sure, anny fool knows that," said Mike. "G'lang!"

"But — but why do you draw stumps then?" asked Wesley.

"That's from land that will be below the water-line," said the captain. "I may take you up to East Hill to-morrow, Wesley."

Wesley said nothing, but he felt that Walters was a little surprised and was looking at him sharply.

For fully an hour they had been rumbling along a rough road through a rather hilly and comparatively open country. Not a sign of life was there, nor vestige of human habitation. At last they rounded a hill.



"There you are, Mr. Query," said Mike, pointing with his whip.

Wesley looked down into a long, irregular valley in which rock and vegetation were profuse and intermingled. The farther end of it seemed two or three miles away and its width was perhaps a mile or more. It was not a symmetrical hollow, but a great rough-hewn gulch, containing innumerable small valleys within it, the whole being completely encompassed by green hills. Through the bottom of the valley a river wound irregularly and disappeared between precipitous rocky heights. Between these cliffs, reaching across from one to the other and curving inward toward the valley, was a conspicuous whitish mass almost as high as the cliffs themselves, whose color and regularity showed it to be the work of man. It vied well with the general aspect of strength which the hills and rocks conveyed; it did not cower among them but rose, majestic and formidable, as if able to cope with them and do its part. Yet it looked strangely out of keeping with the tremendous, wild, disorderly gulch whose outlet it was to close. There was a kind of refinement about its smooth, towering mass, a suggestion of scientific orderliness and plan. It did not seem to boast and swagger like those frowning hills and great boulders. There was the same difference between it and those rough works of Nature that there is between a regiment and a great



mob. It stood there, a stranger, in this wild environment, trim, clean, ready, precise, like Captain Craig himself. It seemed to know its business and its own strength, and could not be bullied. It had been stationed there by the United States of America to forbid the waters to pass, though as yet they flowed, unchallenged, around it. Wesley Binford was glad that he belonged to the United States of America.

Close to this great dam, on a level with its summit, was a concrete building of fair size, flying the Stars and Stripes. And all over the valley, save on the lowest land, were little cabins. They perched on the edges of minor cliffs; they clustered cozily into little communities, here and there, and some could be faintly discerned among the trees just above the valley on the other side.

Donkey-engines, stone-crushing machines, boardwalks over swampy areas, several tents, and pigmy people busy with he knew not what — all these were visible, in panoramic view, to Wesley as they drove along the brink of the valley. Far off, toward the upper end, was a large area of gently sloping land, and here, as far as he could see, a perfect wilderness of slender trees extended up the slope and into the high country beyond. The effect was much more symmetrical and methodical than the rough-and-tumble ways of Nature usually produce.

“There ye are, that’s East Hill,” said Mike.



It was hard to see how there could be any easy descent into this place, but before Wesley knew it instead of looking down into it he was looking up out of it at the road along its brink and trying to figure how he had come down. The wagon rattled along, past cabins, past men working alone and in groups, doing strange things in swamps, digging where there was apparently no reason for it, but none were too busy to doff their hats to Captain Craig and sometimes to stare at Wesley. Bobby's welcome, though less dignified and respectful, was equally cordial.

"Oh, you Bobby Cullen!"

"Hello, Scotchy," called Bob.

"Just in time for the concert."

"Hey, there, Robert — how's pancakes?"

"Hello, you old Jersey mosquito!"

"Oh, you line-work loafer!"

"Oh, you survey-grafter!"

"Where's Mack?"

"He got tagged."

"I *told* him to keep his fingers crossed in Washington."

"They tagged him on the wing," called Bobby.

"You'll be the next."

"Better knock wood yourself, Bobby."

"Who's that guy?"

"He's a boy friend," said Bobby, poking his head



forward in grotesque imitation of the feminine manner.

"Oh, dear, dear!" called a grimy youth who was rolling up a surveyor's tape.

They stopped before a large cabin which seemed to be a kind of storehouse and office, and Captain Craig went inside for a minute. A man who looked like a story-book cowboy came out and chatted with Bobby.

"Hello, Sancho Panza," said he; "how's the teacher's pet?"

Captain Craig came out, stuffing a paper into the band of his hat. A little further on they drew up before a cabin and Bobby, hopping out, said, "Here we are, Wes."

It was Bobby's own cabin. Sometimes he had a companion, and sometimes he lived in it in solitary grandeur — save for the consoling strains of his harmonica. Sometimes he was away for weeks, east, west, south, north, but it was "Bobby's cabin" just the same. According to the big white letter outside, it was "Cabin L." But who cared for the white letter? Bobby was too much of a personality to go by a letter. Other people might "bunk" in A, B, C or in 4, 5, 7, 9, or anything you please. But *this* was "Bobby's cabin." And Bobby did his own housekeeping. That was why he had been greeted as "Pancakes."



It was something of a distinction to bunk with Bobby. . . .

Bobby was busy that afternoon, part of the time with Captain Craig in the cement building near the dam, and later in performing the feat of turning a requisition slip into a little store of provisions, which he brought home in a bright red wheelbarrow with the letters, U.S. on it. Wesley wandered about looking over his new home and the work in which he was to have a part. He paused before donkey-engines which were pumping swamps or hauling logs, and watched the mechanism. He had been so very much engrossed with being a real worldly sort of fellow that the fascination of machinery (dear to the hearts of most boys) had never touched him. But now he was curious and asked questions, and burly, competent men, who understood these things, answered his innocent interrogations cheerfully, sometimes jocosely. And he remembered and pondered on what he heard and saw.

He watched the stone being crushed for the great dam and strolled down and looked at the dam itself. There, in the spillway, were the turbines which would extract the power from the falling water and send it along wires, hundreds and hundreds of miles, to light cities. He wandered through here to the outside and there, on a scaffold against the vast white area of the concave surface of the dam, was a young fellow making chalk-



marks as on a blackboard, white rings all over the lower part of the surface. This must be circling, he thought. Inside each circle was a faint crooked line which could hardly be called a crack. The circle was to call attention to it for inspection. Men in khaki, others in overalls, came and went briskly. Two were talking about "grouting"; Wesley wondered what "grouting" meant. A young fellow with a surveyor's transit over his shoulder passed in, stopping to speak to some one who told him that the captain had come. Wesley felt almost jealous that others should be so much closer to the captain than he was.

He was not unhappy. On the contrary, he was hopeful and full of resolution to do his best. He was a little timid about his ability, it was all so new and strange to him, but he felt that things could never go far wrong if he did his best. He would just take things as they came and do his very level best. At the end of a month he would be paid, and then. . . .

As he wandered about he wondered what he would be set to doing.

But the hardest job which Wesley Binford had to tackle was not there for him to see. And though he was ready with brain and muscle (with his two hands and feet, as he liked to say) still, the job which the boy had to tackle was after all one that was not to be done with hands and feet,



nor with brains either, if it comes to that. It was something which Captain Craig could not teach him.

And, wrong or right, he did that one job in his own way.



## CHAPTER XI

### EAST HILL

A NICKNAME, like vaccination, either takes or it doesn't, and when Mike turned around in the wagon and addressed Wesley as "Query," he unconsciously administered a knock-out blow to the boy's real name. So far as the Gulch was concerned, there was an end of Wesley Binford. The name of "Query" spread like a contagion and though some in the big camp remained unaware of its origin, every one used it, and Wesley accepted the inevitable amiably. Bobby alone ignored it, but Bobby was a law unto himself.

As a rule a nickname implies popularity and there was a certain likable quality in Wesley, a winning naturalness which was very apparent now that the tarnish of affectation and swagger was rubbed off. This attractiveness was heightened by a certain timidity and deference which he displayed in the camp among these strange, strenuous, efficient toilers. He watched them almost enviously. He had a feeling that though they seemed to like him, they looked down on him in a way, as on one who had not much useful knowledge.



It was the seventh week of his life at Long Gulch and he was seated at a little folding-table under the window of the cabin which he shared with Bobby, lettering maps and diagrams. It was not a particularly interesting task, but it gave him a good idea of the work that was going forward both inside and outside of the Gulch, for some of the sheets that were brought to him came from the irrigation district fifty miles down the Missouri, while others were brought in by the "survey boys" and represented their labors in the rough country roundabout the Gulch.

So far as the Gulch itself was concerned, the work was nearly over; they were just pulling together the loose threads, as Bobby said, before the flooding from the hillsides began in real earnest. Already water was trickling into this vast prison, and some of the cabins had been moved up a ledge or two in the irregular valley. Day in and day out, for seven weeks had Wesley sat working patiently, pausing now and then for a moment to rest his weary eyes or to chat with some passerby who stopped and leaned his arms on the rough window-ledge. He wished that he could be outside in the thick of the hard work, but since he could not he was glad that these grim, burly, hustling fellows were moved to stop and have a word with him, now and then.

At five o'clock on this particular day he laid down



his pen with a long sigh, closed his eyes tight, and shook his head sideways to ease the pain in the back of his neck which the continuous eye-strain caused. But through all this toiling, monotonous day one thought had cheered him. In one more week he would receive his hard-earned fifty dollars and then his debt to Harry Arnold would be almost paid.

He had expected to send one-half of the amount to Harry at the end of the first month, but through some government red tape, owing to his having been brought from the East and yet being classified as "local help," his name had not found its proper place on the payroll until about five weeks after he reached the Gulch, and he was therefore to receive two months' pay at the end of the second month. This had been a great disappointment to Wesley. He had often looked wistfully into the little cabin postoffice in envy of those who sent and received letters, for he and he alone seemed to have no world outside of the Gulch. But he had stifled these thoughts by thinking how he would soon march in and send this money, every cent of it, to Oakwood. He had no need for money here in the Gulch. And then at the end of another week of headaches. . . .

"H'lo, Wes!"

Bobby came in like a breeze, as he always did, dropped his transit into a corner, tousled the hair on the back of Wesley's head by way of greeting, and sprawled crossways on his couch.



"Headache again, old man?"

"N-no — not much."

"Anybody round to-day?"

"Haven't seen a soul."

"Why don't you lie down here and close your peepers while I get supper?"

"It's my turn," protested Wesley.

"Yes, it is — not; accent on the *not* — my frap-tious boy. *You* couldn't make hunter's stew, anyway; you got to have a Civil Service man to do that. You know the captain is very particular about those little matters."

"I hear they're going to begin cleaning out a lot of local help," said Wesley. "Did you hear?"

"Don't you worry," said Bobby. "Why, boy, your lettering is the talk of the town." He kicked off one of his muddy shoes, which caught Wesley in the back. "Pardon *me*," he said, effeminately. "The captain will look after you, don't worry."

"Just the same I wish I was C.S.," said Wesley.

Bobby kicked off the other shoe and sat up on the couch staring, half contemptuously, at Wesley.

"You don't mean to tell me that's really troubling you? Why, you great big Jersey mosquito, you make me tired. The captain's got you slated —"

"I know, Bob, but the captain isn't Uncle Sam, after all —"

"What the captain says, goes," interrupted Bobby. "You take that from me.— What you need is some stew."



"I thought maybe the captain had forgotten me."

"Yes, you did! You know better. He's mighty busy, that's all, Wes."

Wesley laughed apologetically. He was so anxious to carry out his plan of restitution that he was in a continual nervous apprehension that something would happen to prevent. And since he had been set at work lettering the maps he had scarcely seen Captain Craig. "Well," he said, cheered by Bobby's very presence, as he always was, "I've got a question."

"Shoot away, Query! Still at it?" said the genial voice of Mike as he entered the cabin, filthy but cordial, leaving his weary team grazing outside.

"It's about East Hill, too," said Wesley.

"Oi'm jist down frum there," said Mike.

Wesley took up one of the maps he had been lettering. "Of course, it's none of my business," said he, "but I understood from the way you people talked that first day I came that the purpose of these ditches is to carry the water around the edge of East Hill so it won't be washing the soil away from those newly-planted trees — erosion, I think you called it."

"Right ye are!" said Mike, as he and Bobby looked over Wesley's shoulder at the map.

"Well, then, it looks to me from this sheet that they're digging about a mile and a half more ditch than necessary. Here are two branches of a



stream and both of them cross this new-tree area. They're starting to make a ditch to deflect each one. Now on this other map you see the two branches divide way up in the woods. Why don't they begin the ditch up above that point? Then they'd only need one ditch instead of two. Here's a place where they could dig a ditch a hundred yards to a natural hollow going way down the south edge of East Hill. Instead they're making one three-quarters of a mile long. They're digging up the whole country up toward the top of East Hill to prevent erosion lower down. It's like winding string every which-way around a bundle. Why not begin your deflecting above the branches? Just a couple of shovelfuls would turn a small stream. It's something like those cut-offs that you talk of down the Mississippi."

"Ye niver said a thruer worrd," said Mike, after this long speech. "Fwhat we nade oop there is some of thim boys frum Panamar, as kin dig ditches wid their brains."

"Well," said Bobby, "we're going to have a regular pest of them soon, if what I hear is true. Half a dozen of those Culebra Cut fellows are scheduled to hit us in a couple of weeks or so."

"Query's roight, an' he's got a good brain — Oi'll say that fur 'im. Fwhat they nade oop yonder is *exparience* — that's fwhat they nade. The cap'n don't bother his head about it. 'Tis all dam,



dam, dam, wid him. An' fwhat does th' Forestry people care s'long's th' trees is protected? Wan mile or tin mile uv ditch, 'tis all th' same ter thim."

"Oh, I guess it's all right," said Bobby; "don't worry that old nut of yours about the ditches, Wes."

"But just look at the map," urged Wesley, as Bobby turned away to his stew.

"Fwhat they nade is exparience," repeated Mike, sagaciously. "Brains is all roight, but — Now, ter show ye, there wuz a feller out o' wan o' thim institutes — he coom down ter Panamar an' they give him four men and started 'em on a sanitary trench<sup>1</sup> from Spig Village to Corozal. Fwhat did he do? Afther diggin' fer t'ree days he came to a crossing of anither ditch. An' he scratched his head loike, fer, sez he, 'there wuz not supposed to be anny ditches ter cross. Wall,' sez he, 'here's one that's not on the map, an' Oi'll folly it oop jist fer ter see where it goes.' So he lays down his pick and goes afther the other ditch, an' along about dusk he brings oop at th' same spot where he laid down his pick. 'Be jiggers,' sez he, scratchin' his head, 'if thim Spaniards hasn't got th'whole land bewitched.' Then oop come Flynn, his man, an' him as told me the sthory — oop come Flynn, an' sez he, 'Tis the same thrench only we got it tied in a sailor's knot!' Wall, sir, it tuk thim t'ree weeks —"

<sup>1</sup> Swamp drainage.



At this juncture a pillow from the couch caught Mike in the face, effectually cutting off further recital.

"Fwhat they nade," he concluded, "is expari-ence. Are yez comin' t'the concert to-night in Cabin B?"

"We'll drop in later," said Bobby, as he fell to setting the table.

They could hear Mike's sonorous "G'lang!" to the horses, as he turned homeward.

"Mike's daft on the subject of Panama, isn't he?" laughed Wesley. "But I dare say he's right about their needing experience up there."

"Experience nothing!" said Bobby. "They're all right. There's only half a dozen L.H.'s up there now, but they know how to dig ditches, all right, you can bet. The government was going to send out a young man to look after all that business six months ago, just after the Forestry people planted the trees for us, but he must have taken a mighty slow train, for he isn't here yet. That's the way it is. The captain's been so busy he hasn't even been up there, nor either of the other engineers. But the L.H. fellows are doing all right by themselves.—You've got ditches on the brain."

"But, Bobby, don't you see—" persisted Wesley.

"See nothing," interrupted Bobby. "What do you know about ditches anyway?—Come on to supper."



The next morning when Wesley awoke he saw that Bobby had made an early cup of coffee and departed. Also the map which Wesley had shown him had departed.

"Wonder what he's up to," mused Wesley.

He was destined to know before long, for scarcely had he cleared away his own breakfast things when Captain Craig walked briskly into the cabin. He was without his belted jacket, wearing a khaki negligee shirt instead, and a brown silk handkerchief tucked in around his throat.

"Well, Wesley, how goes it? What's all this I hear about East Hill? You're not satisfied with the way things are going on up there, eh?"

"I didn't mean to criticise, Captain.— I guess — did you see Bobby?"

"Yes; he says you don't like the way they're digging those deflection ditches. He brought me this map."

Wesley was uncomfortable. He felt that he had been too free with his criticism of what did not concern him, and he thought the captain felt the same way. His brisk, alert manner disconcerted Wesley.

"I — I — maybe I didn't get just the right idea of it from the map — I suppose it's just a rough sketch, anyway —" And to himself he thought, "I'll jump all over Bobby for this."

"The sketch is all right," said the captain,



crisply. "So you think there's a couple of miles too much ditch, eh?"

"I did — but —"

"But what?"

"Oh, all sorts of things occur to me when I'm working on the maps. I guess most of them are pipe dreams."

"Of course, Wesley, if you haven't the courage of your convictions, if you have no confidence in yourself, you can hardly expect us to have confidence in you. I'm here to get the benefit of your thought. You and I and Bobby are all working for the government. Uncle Sam isn't so rich and great that he can afford to disregard an honest expression of opinion."

"I didn't suppose I had any business to —"

"Well, you have," the captain interrupted. "Now tell me what your idea is."

Wesley went over the maps more thoroughly than he had with Bobby, and the captain listened thoughtfully, occasionally shaking his head in doubt, or nodding a qualified approval. Once when Wesley pointed to a place where he thought a quarter of a mile could be saved, he said, "A hundred feet would be nearer;" apparently willing to concede that something could be saved. He passed from one map to another, spreading his little pocket dividers here and there, pursing his lips, shaking his head. . . .



Wesley had no idea what the sum of his thought was, but he was amazed at his mental activity and open-mindedness. There was no professional pride and dignity about the captain, and Wesley, uncertain of himself as he was, marveled that he (a mere inexperienced boy) could start the machinery of this man's brain to get at the truth of this minor matter. But there was just the greatness of Captain Craig.

He was now walking back and forth, saying nothing.

"If — if I'm right," ventured Wesley, "I should think maybe one of those Panama fellows —"

"I've heard enough about those fellows," said the captain, tartly; then, turning suddenly, "Wesley," said he, "let Bobby leave all those maps at headquarters to-morrow morning. You go up to East Hill after lunch and see what you can do. There are three laborers up there and I'll have them instructed to follow your lime.<sup>2</sup> I can't promise you the money that kind of work calls for because you're not C.S. Keep your wits about you, think big, and don't be afraid of a bold idea when you're once convinced it's practical. That's engineering. Put a little originality into it and let's see what you've got in you. I'll drop up there in a day or two."

You could have knocked Wesley down with a

<sup>2</sup> Marks made with lime to indicate for digging.



feather. He stood gaping and speechless as the captain went through the door. There he paused and swung around, facing the astonished boy.

"There's another thing, Wesley," he said, rapidly. "Bobby seems to think you're worrying about this talk of weeding out the unskilled force, now the work is nearing completion. There's always gossip in a camp like this. Pay no attention to it. Do you remember what I told you the day you came to Governor's Island?"

"Yes, sir, I do. I remember the very words, and I've said them to myself a good many times, too. You said that if I did well my services would be appreciated."

"Have you any reason to think that I am going to break my word?"

"No, sir, I —"

"Very well, then," said the captain, and he was gone.

Wesley gathered up the litter on his little table, in a daze. Not the least part of his joy was this evidence of the real friendship of Bobby Cullen.

Yes, Bobby was very fond of him. That is why he called him a Jersey mosquito, and kicked his muddy shoes at him, and trowsled his hair for him, and told him he didn't have sense enough to know how to cook supper. Wesley had never realized that these were all marks of affection, but he saw them now in a new light.



As for Captain Craig, if all the nations of the earth, headed by Uncle Sam, should unite to combat the captain, Wesley felt perfectly assured that the captain would land on top. One result of his life here in the Gulch was that he had come to respect and then to love Uncle Sam.

But he worshiped Captain Craig.



## CHAPTER XII

### A STRANGER AND AN ACCIDENT

EAST HILL rose well above the Gulch. Even after the Gulch was flooded the waters would only graze the lower reach of the hill; and this was a foothill of still higher and more rugged hills beyond in whose remote fastnesses the wild waters foregathered and lay dormant through the winter-time. And below the easy, even slope of East Hill the rugged walls of the Gulch descended, ledge upon ledge, with miniature plateaus here and there, sparsely covered with vegetation.

Year in and year out these wild waters, awakening in the spring, had trickled down the easy slope into the Gulch and, dashing from rock to rock, had joined the river to swell it and send it forth on its errand of death and devastation. But Uncle Sam had now raised his great concrete hand forbidding these death-dealing legions to pass. Yet still they trickled down East Hill, washing away its substance to clog the rivers below with mud, and rear great sand-bars in their channels.

So the Forestry people had planted East Hill thick with little trees, helpless, tender, fragile in-



fants that needed watching and nursing, and required to have their little roots safeguarded from these ruthless forces descending out of the mountains. Some day these little trees would become strong and self-supporting, binding the earth together with their tangle of mighty roots, and the waters would pass over without taking toll. Then little particles of East Hill would not pass out through the spillway to reunite and menace navigation.

So the protectors of the future had to be guarded now, and that is what Bobby Cullen meant when he told his friends, the "Topographic<sup>1</sup> boys," that his cabin-mate had gone up on East Hill to mind the babies. He forgot to tell them that *he* had been instrumental in procuring him this position. Bobby was very forgetful — sometimes.

As the days passed Wesley became more and more interested in his new work. To him it was an engineering job on a small scale, requiring calculation and judgment. The three foreign laborers followed his directions in cheerful subservience, and the four formed a happy little family on the hill, with the Gulch and all its bustling toilers in panoramic view below them.

As the rush of waters from the mountains increased, the work became more difficult and complicated. Sometimes, despite all his carefully laid

<sup>1</sup> Members of the Geological Survey, engaged in mapping.



plans, it would insinuate its way over the hillside, plowing furrows among the trees and leaving their young roots bare. But these tactics were always counteracted by new ditches and as time went on Wesley acquired a sort of instinctive knowledge of where the water would come down, and he would trace the slightest hollows away up into the woods, always looking for causes rather than waiting for results. Once a few days of rain reinforced the continually advancing foe; the water overflowed the little trenches, swept over the hill, and, added to the direct fall of the rain itself, left a sorry demonstration of erosion on the slope. That night he clambered down into the Gulch and went home discouraged.

"It's just been a case of trying to hold the fort to-day, Bobby," he said.

"Yes, and it'll be worse before it's better, too, Wes," was the encouraging reply.

And it was. The spring freshets were on in real earnest. Down through a thousand crannies, the water went tumbling, trickling, rushing, or stealing, into the Gulch, and the spreading puddles in the great valley grew to ponds, uniting one with another; the old familiar swamps were becoming submerged, the life of the Gulch was beginning to perch higher; cabins and machinery were moved up out of the level where the swelling river wound its way. It would be many months before the



Gulch would be filled and this hustling city of a day gone forever.

Wesley often looked far down at the white mass at the other end of the rugged valley, and at the brown specks moving about on it. That was where the captain's interest centered. But once, twice, he came up and made a hurried call on Wesley, giving him points, advising him about this and that, talking in his brisk, convincing way, and leaving with Wesley the impression that his work was satisfactory.

He was never wearier, and he was never filthier, and he was never happier, than when he clambered down below East Hill one night for the short-cut which he often took into the Gulch. It had been a hard day, taxing mind and body, and he was looking forward to his quiet, home-cooked supper with Bobby. He was full of plans for the morrow.

He knew the pay he was receiving was wholly inadequate to the work he was doing, but he knew that this was from an unavoidable circumstance; he was not on Civil Service and was only doing important work because Captain Craig had taken a fancy to him. If the captain were straining a point to give him this work, that was all the boy could expect. He could not receive good wages while scheduled as local help. He was thankful for his position, for the captain's confidence, for Bobby's friendship, and most of all he was thank-



ful that fifty dollars, sent by himself, must by this time have reached Oakwood.

He was now a familiar figure as he passed along through the Gulch each day, to and from East Hill. Often the men would call, "Well, Query, *your* days are numbered," "I hear the captain's not satisfied with you," or more often make some joking comment about the shipment of skilled workers from Panama which was scheduled to descend upon the Gulch within a short time. "An' that'll be the ind uv Query," Mike would say, but out of the boy's hearing he was ready enough to confess that not even the experience and skill gained in Culebra Cut could have carried forward this work with more care and intelligence than Wesley had shown. "An' it simply shows," he would add, "that ingineers is born an' not made."

Query had learned to take this banter and jolly-ing good-naturedly; indeed, he was too engrossed in his work to be annoyed. Secure in the captain's favor, confident in his promise, Wesley pinned his faith to this one thought, that if he did his work well it would be appreciated. He sometimes thought ruefully of that swaggering, blasé young gentleman who used to edify the simple Sparrow, and of how that same young gentleman had boasted that he would not make *his* living in a pair of overalls. He knew now that some of the men who wore overalls received five or six thousand dollars



a year as a balm to that terrible humiliation. Wesley had supposed that a man who wore a high collar and traveled on a commutation ticket always received more money than the man who wore a flannel shirt and whose suspenders were visible. He was now aware that it was often quite the other way.

On this particular evening, as he was picking his way down into the Gulch, he paused at what the workers called the "mezzanine," a plateau several acres in extent and about fifty feet above the bed of the valley. From this place the slope to the land below was very abrupt, and clustered near its foot were several cabins. These were occupied by men who handled the logs which were rolled down from the mezzanine, where trees were being felled; for since the plateau would eventually be submerged it was necessary to relieve it of all material capable of rotting and causing impurities. There was a plan afoot to face this whole slope with concrete, since in the dry season it would be above the water-line and have to serve, from time to time, as bank.

Two or three fellows, returning like Wesley from their work, were perched on a large rock watching one of those terrific struggles known as "stump-hauling," of which Mike had told him. It was a demonstration of sheer, blind, relentless brute power, by which a mammoth root was being slowly wrenched up out of the earth in which it had for



years spread its damp, strong tentacles. There was something heroic in the tenacious resistance of these great snakelike sinews; one felt that they had a right to resist because the earth was their home.

About fifty yards away was the simple engine which performed this heartless deed. It consisted of a collection of stout piles driven into the earth, until the top of the whole circular mass was within a few inches of the ground. From these were laid outward upon the ground stout beams in every direction, like the sun's rays, and the outer end of each abutted against a smaller group of piles driven into the earth. Out of the central pile rose a heavy steel bar, hardly less than a foot in diameter, which supported a gigantic spool as big as a hogshead with a long wooden crossbar, perhaps fifty feet in length, running through it. This bar was reinforced along the sides where its lateral strain would come by metal girding, such as one sees beneath a railroad car to counteract the sagging tendency of its center. Here, in this long crossbar, reposed that invincible natural power which is neither steam nor gas nor electricity, a power which is multiplied with every inch of length, the tremendous and resistless power of leverage. At the extreme ends of the bar two teams of stout horses stood waiting. From the great spool a mammoth chain dragged along the ground and was wound around and fastened to the distant stump.



The stump had just been "looped" as Wesley vaulted onto the rock.

"Going to be some fight," commented one of the onlookers.

"Bet she holds like an old molar."

To Wesley the impending operation *was* unpleasantly suggestive of the drawing of a great tooth.

"She'll snap the crossbar, you see," another of the watchers observed.

"No, she won't, but she's going to give that windlass a wrench or two, hey, Query?"

Wesley looked at the distant windlass. "Seems to me," he said, "a big root ought to know how to hang on better than any beam; it's fighting on its own territory, as you might say."

"For its home," said another of his companions.

"Oh, she'll come all right, but you never know what revenge they'll take."

"There she goes," said another.

There was the clanking sound of tightening chain; the horses had started leisurely around. Then came the crackling of bark as the tightening metal links pressed cruelly into the yielding wood. The whole length of chain was off the ground, a taut bee-line from stump to windlass. Its every link seemed to quiver with the terrific strain. A piece of bark flew over and hit Wesley. He had a feeling that in another moment a link from the snapped chain would catch him in the head.



“She has a trick or two up her sleeve, but —”

“There she comes!”

The distant teams were now in an attitude of straining. The great stump appeared to stir, ever so slightly. Wesley saw it and was almost sorry. For the moment his sympathy was with the remains of that mammoth tree, taking its last stand against the power and device of man. The suggestion of a great tooth lingered with him and his imagination could not dissociate this awful wrenching and hauling and inevitable slow yielding from the idea of physical pain. It must hurt the earth to have a great jagged, quivering wound made in it.

From the big windlass came the sound of straining wood, and a sudden clank and spasmodic movement of the chain as one great link slipped off another on the big spool. He felt that the stump must feel the relief of this momentary slack. Then the chain was taut again. Something would have to happen surely. The chain seemed impartial, willing to snap in either cause and terminate the struggle of these monsters that it joined. The horses trudged around, straining, their heads low, the dirt flying from their cutting hoofs. And snap the chain would have in just another second if —

“Ah-h-h-h-h!” drawled one of the watchers in triumphant satisfaction as the chafed, sturdy, strangled monster yielded, leaning toward its adversary. Behind it the ground bulged, cracked and gaped open as if from a small earthquake.



In this business the first yielding is always fatal. The doubt, if there were any, was over. The stout, brave, maltreated old remnant of the majestic tree was coming up out of its earthen home. Slowly, with merciless, invincible power, its strong, clinging, far-reaching tentacles were being dislodged and drawn, willy-nilly, through the crumbling earth where they had spread and grown. The odor of the fresh under-soil was diffused about as the long sinewy arms came away, the black earth dripping from them.

"I — I hope she *does* take her revenge," said Wesley.

The others laughed at the effect it had left upon him.

"Never saw one hauled before, Query?"

The task was easy now, the surrender complete. To Wesley it seemed as if it must be humiliating to this monstrous root to be wrenched up slowly into the light of day, and to follow so meekly after its conqueror. Its first calm resistance had been so splendid, so dignified! The horses trotted around now, the chain danced with a wholesome, moderate, safe tightness, which did not cause the boy to hold his breath.

"All over but the shouting," said one of Wesley's companions, sliding from the rock; "me for mess-cabin."

"Wait a minute," said another, sliding off; "coming, Query?"



But Wesley was not restricted by the household rules of "mess-cabin"; he and Bobby dined when they happened to get home. This thing that he had watched was evidently no new sight to his departing friends.

He slid from the rock and approaching the stump saw that it was still showing a good deal of resistance. Its network of earth-caked roots lay in a great jagged chasm. The ends of the longer branches of root were still embedded in the solid earth below, but were coming up slowly. Wesley could fancy this cruel, ragged chasm throbbing with the pain of that terrible wrench it had received. He wondered how far those larger roots extended. After watching for a few minutes his gaze turned to the Gulch below. He could see men coming along and disappearing under the abrupt slope, evidently going into the cabins close beneath it. Then, as he looked, he seemed to see something nearby which startled him. Ever since those long weeks of concentrated eye-strain, his vision had played strange antics, so now he closed his eyes (a habit he had acquired) to rest them for a moment. When he opened them he realized that what he had seen was real.

The big rock on which he had been sitting was stirring.

All in a flash he realized that the great stump did indeed have "something up its sleeve," and this



was it. The rock was at the very point where the plateau met the abrupt slope. In another half minute it would be crashing down upon those tiny cabins. Over at the windlass he could see the horses plodding around and hear the voices of the men, thinned by the distance. Close by him the stump was slowly coming up. For just one moment he was helpless. Then he got hold of his mind.

“Whoa — back!” he shrieked at the top of his voice, accompanying the shout with a significant motion of his raised hands. The turning continued and again he shouted. This time the teams stopped.

“Back!” he yelled. “Give me some slack!” He pointed to the rock, but no one seemed to understand. The great rock stirred again. A pebble fell from it. Then he saw the teams shifted and felt the slack, as the windlass unwound. Trying to control his excitement, Wesley loosened the chain from the stump. As he did so the wounded bark fell away in powder. He laid the heavy chain free of the prone stump, then with all his might he hauled its hooked end out to the edge of the slope. Meanwhile, he tried to make the distant men understand that they should conform to his movements, giving him such slack as he needed to loop the rock, but no more. For he felt that if the looped rock descended on a slack chain its tremendous momen-



tum would snap the links like thread at the moment of tightening. It must be looped and the chain made taut simultaneously. But the men did not seem to understand; instead, one of them came running toward him.

"*Fool!*" said Wesley, in panic impatience. But there was slack enough; the trouble was there was too much. The rock would be halfway down before the chain tightened. Now it stirred again and a small rock beneath it went bouldering down into the Gulch.

Panting and frightened, he hauled and tugged the great chain to the rock. Now the man who was running seemed to understand and yelled for him to get back. But it was too late.

In ordinary circumstances no human being of average strength and with the natural regard for his own life, could have done what Wesley did. But the emergency, the precarious position of that mammoth boulder, the cabins below, his wrath that the men did not understand him,—all these things made him utterly, frantically reckless, and of that furious, blind insanity a certain brute strength was born. What he did he was hardly conscious of doing.

He clambered up on the rock, hauled the chain after him and cast it down on the other side, vaulting down after it. He tugged it around under a corner of the hesitant mass, dragging it up after



him on the other side. Now he was on top, now below, and the chain was wound around the rock in every direction. His heart thumped and pounded and his side had a cruel, kinky pain. The earth was giving way underneath, the rock was lurching.

He had used up nearly every yard of slack and was about to try to call when the great rock swayed, its top became its side, and Wesley was thrown below it. The great hook was caught in one of the links, the rock descended a yard — two yards — three — and was just gathering momentum for its murderous descent, when the staunch chain, tightening, halted it. There was the sound of grinding stone as the great oval steel links crushed into the inert mass, and held it securely on the abrupt slope.

They raised it a little with the windlass and lifted Wesley gently out from where he had been caught. From the cabins below people whose lives had been all but crushed out came up to see what the trouble was. The men from the windlass were there, too, and said the chain was a marvel, that it would hold anything, and that the boy must have been stark mad.

Whether he was stark mad or not he was wholly unconscious. His face was ashen white and the tokens of his frantic struggle were all over him, in



his torn clothes, his scraped and bleeding knees. But these were trifles, the spoils of war. His eyes were half open and there was blood on his lips. One of his shoes was off. His hand looked like a waxen hand, white, inhuman.

“Is it Query?” a man asked softly.

“Sure.”

“I didn’t know him — his lips look so thin.”

They got an army stretcher and carried him down the easy incline of a by-path, and into one of the cabins. A young girl who pressed her way through the accompanying throng to get a glimpse of him, shrieked and rushed away. And seeing her, other women who hovered about turned away, afraid to look and panting visibly. . . .

Up on the deserted mezzanine the lonely stump held its solitary sway. In the gathering darkness the great wound, with the tangled roots lying within it, seemed a black cavern. Standing at a respectful distance, the cross-bar of the conquering windlass threw a long ghostlike shadow to the edge of the plateau. The staunch chain, a black line, reached taut from the windlass and disappeared at the abrupt descent. There was a long, irregular rent in the earth where the rock had stood. The chafed, bruised, conquered stump lay prone above its maze of subterranean legions. Several mam-



moth arms still extended from it into the depths. One of these, assailed from above, had struck from below.

The old stump had its revenge.



## CHAPTER XIII

### THE HERO

THE girl who screamed and ran away lived to look another day. And the next time she looked at the face of Query she liked it much better. He was lying in the cabin of her parents where he had first been carried, and she could not avoid seeing him even if she wished to. But she did not wish to avoid seeing him.

There is no situation in which two persons may find themselves where acquaintance progresses more rapidly than in that of convalescent and nurse. There had been one night of awful apprehension when the Gulch's young doctor had remained close to the unconscious boy, then several days of a less tense anxiety, while the fear of internal injuries gradually lessened, and then one afternoon the girl heard him calling her "Thanksgiving Day," and by that sign she knew that he was getting better.

He was lying on a cot in the little room, his head weakly inclined toward her, as she moved about tidying the place according to her usual evening custom. There was a suggestion of health and briskness in her movements and Wesley liked to watch her.



"Why do you call me Thanksgiving?" she asked.

"Why? Oh, I don't know; because I ought to be so thankful to you, I suppose."

"That isn't the reason at all; you're just making fun of me."

There was a touch of mischief in Wesley's eyes as he watched her hurrying about the room. "I'll call you the Fourth of July if you'd rather," he ventured.

"Oh, of course, anything you like."

Wesley's eyes still followed her. "Why do they call you Easter?" he finally asked.

"Why? Don't you like it? You could call me Miss Merrick if you'd rather."

"Yes, but I wouldn't rather."

"Well?" said she.

"Well," said he.

Then there was a pause.

"Why *do* they call you Easter?" he repeated.

"Because, Mr. Query, I was born on Easter Sunday; there, now I hope you're satisfied."

There was another interval of silence while she continued to move about the little room.

"I think it fits you pretty well," said Wesley.

"Well, I think Query fits *you* pretty well if it comes to that," retorted the girl.

Again he fell to watching her, an amused twinkle in his eyes. You can see for yourself that he was getting better.



"How does it fit me pretty well?" she suddenly demanded, swinging round upon him.

"How?" he parried. "How should I know? It just does."

"You must have some reason."

"Reasons aren't necessary. You can think things without having reasons, I hope. This is a free country."

"I don't see how a name can fit," she said.

"It does, just the same. Sort of reminds me of Easter lilies."

"How?"

"I mean you and the name together."

"I think you're delirious yet," said the girl.

"You can bet I'm not."

"Well, then, if it wouldn't be too much trouble, I'd like to know how I could remind you of Easter lilies."

"No trouble at all," said Wesley; "but I said you and the name together; and the white dress, too. If you were lying here instead of me you'd see it. Just now when you turned around and leaned over it reminded me of lilies.—I have all sorts of funny thoughts lying here."

She was evidently satisfied for she said nothing, only went and stood beside his cot.

"Does your foot hurt now?"

"Only when I move it sideways."

"Well, don't move it sideways then."



There was a suggestion of the old Wesley Binford in his manner these days, a touch of his old levity, but it was in a very mild form and the girl did not dislike it. Perhaps it was the enforced idleness, or perhaps it was just a touch of that banter which many boys exhibit with girls. Or it may have been that his way of looking at the accident which had laid him low occasioned that semblance of the old sneer, which now and then got the upper hand of his countenance. If there were any discerning people in the Gulch who fancied that Wesley's success on East Hill had turned his head a little (and I'm afraid there were), why, at least, they could make no such claim in regard to his looping of the rock. He was perfectly honest with himself about that. He knew he had done it in blind recklessness. He believed that he could not do it again. He had never been fond of boys' books, and he did not relish being what he called a "story-book hero." "People always fall for gallery stunts," he sneeringly observed to Easter one day, and somehow it had grated on her, giving her the impression that he felt superior to the people who were lauding his heroism; particularly as *she* was one of these people.

Then again, it sometimes annoyed her a little that he did not take her seriously, but must be always dealing in this satirical banter as if he thought a girl were hardly worthy of more serious



treatment. He had a habit of "jolly" her and of making light of heroic deeds generally, with a little sneer, which irritated her. You see, it is not always the hard work, but the heroic deeds, which attract a young lady.

Wesley could never again be the same as he had once been. To Honor Sparrow he had been unbearable. But I can tell you he was a very long way from being unbearable to Easter Merrick. Probably she would not have noticed these little jarring traits in him if she had not liked him so much.

And you know, there is something to be said on Wesley's side, too. He was very far from being perfect, yet I fancy he was coming to have a good focus now on life and its realities. He never sneered at his work on East Hill.

He had, and I suppose it was natural, just a little of that arrogant pride which a person has who succeeds without the usual advantages and when people have thought he would not succeed. He was proud of his work, and he was honest enough with himself not to be carried away by the applause following a deed of sheer madness. He would not pose as a hero; and there was an unpleasant little touch of superciliousness in his manner sometimes toward the people whose vision was so distorted.

But if Wesley retained the unhappy habit of sneering he, at least, sneered at different kinds of things.



"Does it hurt now?" Easter asked sympathetically.

"Oh, some — it feels tired."

He looked at her with a little smile of resignation and she stood looking down at him with sympathy all over her face.

"I believe it hurts more than you say."

"I suppose that's the way with compound fractures," he said, "the pain kind of multiplies up — like compound interest."

Still she stood watching him as if she did not understand one who could joke while suffering.

"Tell me some of the funny thoughts you have lying there."

"Oh, they're too funny to tell; sit down and talk to me."

"I can't — I've got to go and help mother. Do you know it's five o'clock? The men are coming down."

"No, they're not, I can hear them chopping up on the mezzanine, yet. Sit down."

"No, really I can't," she said. Then she sat down.

"Besides," she said, as if this line of talk had just been interrupted, "if it's a question of thanksgiving, I think we're the ones to be thankful. You saved our lives."

"Oh, I'm some hero."

"Do you know what Captain Craig said?" she asked, ignoring his remark.



"No, what did he say?"

"He said that it wasn't your bravery that was so remarkable as the fact that even in your terrible haste and excitement you knew just how to loop the rock so the chain would tighten on it when it moved. He said you must have *known* the rock would slide a little to the left before it came down. And by doing it scientifically, you see, you saved not only our lives but your own."

"I'd have been some pancake in another second, all right."

"Ugh! I *wish* you wouldn't talk that way — it's dreadful."

She sat rocking quietly a few moments, her pretty feet crossed before her.

"I think it's just wonderful what you've been doing up on the hill. Captain Craig said you have the makings of an engineer. Isn't that fine?"

"Scrumptious."

"I've been hearing all about you from Bobby Cullen. He said you had no technical training at all; and now —"

"You mustn't believe all Bobby says."

"I think he's splendid, don't you?"

"Well, I guess, yes."

"And don't you admire the captain?"

"You said it!" observed Wesley.

Then another silence fell, broken only by the creaking of her chair on the rough cabin floor.



"I used to notice you going up and down," she said, "but you never noticed me. I used to wonder why the men called you Query. I wouldn't let them call me Query if I were you."

"Why?"

"Not if I had such a pretty name as Wesley."

"You ought to be satisfied," he said, "with a name like Easter."

"Don't you think it's freakish?"

"No — and it's not the only pretty thing about you, either."

An invalid is privileged to say what he pleases. She sat rocking and blushing a trifle, and Wesley wondered why he never had noticed her, and how much Bobby Cullen had noticed her. It seemed odd that Bobby had never mentioned her.

"I used to wonder who you were," she said weakly.

"Well, now you know."

"Do you ever imagine things about people you've never met? Then you meet them and they seem so different."

"Do *I* seem different?"

"N-no — not exactly. I fancied your name was Ralph; wasn't that absurd?"

Another pause.

"May I come and see you sometimes, after Friday?"

"Do you want to?"



"Do you think I want to?"

"How should I know?"

"Well, guess."

"Oh, I'm perfectly dreadful at guessing."

"You ought to be able to guess that — it's easy."

"There," she said, rising, "the men *are* coming down."

Up on the mezzanine the long blast of a horn, echoed by another far down at the dam, told that the day's work was over.

On Friday Mike stopped on his way home, and leaning on his stalwart arm Wesley hobbled back to Bobby's cabin. One of the woodsmen up on the mezzanine had hewn and trimmed him a stout cane, and limping along with the aid of this he presented an odd combination of an old man and a young boy.

There was no note of levity in his expression of gratitude to the good people who had sheltered and nursed him.

"Are you sorry to go?" Mrs. Merrick asked him.

He hesitated until Easter asked if he had heard her mother's question. Then he said that he was sorry and glad; sorry to leave their hospitable roof but glad to get home and back to work soon. "You didn't guess," he added to Easter.

"Guess what?" she asked, though she knew very well what he meant.



"Whether I want to come and see you."

"Well, then," she said with courageous frankness, "I guess you do."

"You're a good guesser," said Wesley and they both laughed.

She stood in the doorway looking after them and when they disappeared behind the end of the long "Supplies cabin" she still waited until they emerged upon the board-walk across the swamp behind it.

"Careful," she called.

Wesley turned and waved his hand.

"Easter," called her mother, "are you coming to help me? You know, we're likely to be quartered <sup>1</sup> in another week or two."

"I'm coming, mother." But they were far down the Gulch before she went in.

It was on his way home that Wesley learned what a hero he really was. Few of the technical force were to be seen but the people whose cabins he passed came out in little squads to congratulate him and to speak of his feat. Indeed, his progress homeward was hardly less than a triumphal march, or rather, a triumphal hobble, and Mike was highly elated.

"But he's a strange kid, he is," he later observed; "be jiggers, if it didn't make him mad ter

<sup>1</sup> Meaning to have new recruits quartered with them, theirs being a double cabin.



hear thim! Ye niver know fwhat's goin' on inside his head, an' that's the truth. Oi doon't understand him at ahl."

Bobby was already cooking supper (a sumptuous meal in honor of the hero's return) when the pair came in and Wesley, smiling and exhausted, sat down on the edge of his own cot.

"Home, sweet home," he panted.

"Home, sweet home, Wes," said Bobby.

"Gee, but everything looks natural," Wesley said. "I suppose you've been falling back into those old hermit ways of yours; I'll have to drag you out again."

Bobby only smiled, genuinely happy, and poked a fork into a potato to see if it was done.

"Ye want t'look oot fer 'im," said Mike; "he'll be sneakin' oop East Hill termorrer fer worrk — he's daft on th'subject."

"Guess there's something up East Hill way now besides work," commented Bobby.

Mike screwed his face into a tremendously significant wink. "Wall, Oi'll say this," said he, "th'best hoosekaper in this here Goolch is Robert Coolen. Whin Oi wuz in Panamar —"

"I'll pour this boiling water over you if you don't cut out 'Panamar,'" said Bobby.

Wesley smiled at the perpetual good-natured war between the two. He made no disclaimer to the intimation about the other attraction at East Hill.



Perhaps he felt that there was some ground of truth in Bobby's joking comment.

Presently Mike made it worse.

"Aw, wall," said he, in friendly confidence to Bobby; "fwhat do ye care? Sure, it wudn't be th'furst gurrl —"

"Shut up!" said Wesley.

"Oi'll not. Oi'm spakin' to me frind, Robert Coolen.—If ye should iver fale lonesome of a noight, Bobby, ye've got yer harmonica, an' ye kin allus sind over fer yer thrue frind, Michael Kerri-gan, an' Oi'll dhrop in an' tip ye a shtave on me accordia. We kin play dooits, loike."

With this he gave Bobby another significant grimace and was gone.

"Is it good to get back, Wes? Sit down there. What's the matter with you?"

Wesley sank back luxuriously on the cot. "Yes, it is, Bob. I can't tell you how good it is."

"It's some honor being chief cook to the world's hero, Wes."

"Oh, don't *you* give me that."

"I was afraid you wouldn't come till to-morrow."

"Bob, what did you mean by that you said — about — other things up East Hill?"



## CHAPTER XIV

### BAD NEWS

So Wesley resumed his work on East Hill and if the spring freshets took advantage of his absence, they paid dearly for it on his return. He had not lain on his back ten days to no purpose, and now the result of his cogitations was visible and extremely audible in a couple of sturdy little gas engines placed at strategic points to pump out the water which had managed to maneuver itself into forbidden territory.

The unmuffled explosions of these two little demons could be heard down on the mezzanine and even in the cabins below, and Wesley, as he limped about his domain, would pause now and again and, leaning on his cane, listen knowingly to the steady chugging, as a doctor will listen attentively to a patient's coughing. Then sometimes he would hobble over and alter this sound by the merest touch of a valve. Again he would sniff the air, which was one of the ingredients of his fuel, and adjust his carbureter according to the lightness or heaviness of the atmosphere.

He learned to know a healthy chugging when he



heard it, and to know that erratic chugging meant loss of power, often a strain or shock to bearings and waste of fuel. He learned the habits of wild water too, as a trainer learns the instincts of a savage beast. He learned the tactics it employs.

Do you know, I should like to have stepped up to him in those days, just as he stood there scowling and thoughtful, gone right up to him where he stood wearing that greasy flannel shirt and leaning on that stout cane to favor his injured foot; I should like to have quietly approached and asked him if he thought *that* was the kind of work for a young gentleman to be doing and whether he didn't remember that threat about wearing overalls. I should like to have offered him a position in the Forbes Perfumery Co., promising him Saturday afternoons all the year round. I should have been very particular to emphasize this inducement about the Saturday afternoons, just to see how he would take it. It would have been a pretty mean thing to do, but I should like to have done it.

The fact was that he not only didn't take Saturday afternoons, but that he sometimes even failed to notice the horn at evening. It seemed that he was always in the middle of something when this annoying signal blew, and he heard it often with resentment as if there were a kind of conspiracy to interfere with his important labors; and when the three men went down, weary and



hungry, he would hobble about alone. He was lord of the manor up there; he had the lord's pride of ownership and accomplishment, and he liked to linger about his little dominion planning new tasks for the morrow.

That is how it fell out that Bobby Cullen often ate his home-cooked supper alone; and that Wesley would often drop in just in the nick of time and eat *his* home-cooked supper in Luke Merrick's cabin. "Stay and have supper with us," Easter had said when he paused one evening, "that will rest your foot and you'll feel more like walking home. Bobby will know."

So Wesley stayed to rest his foot; and after he had stayed several times in this way, Bobby knew.

Sometimes after supper Wesley would rest his foot by strolling down to the dam with Easter to see how the crown-work and the footbridge were coming on, and it would be ten o'clock or after when he limped home. He usually found Bobby playing his harmonica. Bobby asked few questions, he seemed always glad when Wesley came home, and was the same old bantering, affectionate friend.

"H'lo, Wes," he would say, "how are things? Tired, old man?" When this sort of thing came two nights hand-running Wesley had a kind of guilty feeling which sometimes took the form of a defensive surliness, and sometimes an excess of



cordiality. Bobby was always the same. Once, when Wesley came in late he noticed Bobby's supper things, one plate, one cup, one saucer, still standing on their little makeshift table.

"I'm going to dope out a plan here," said Wesley, "be all right to put these away?"

"Sure," said Bobby. "I'll put them away; sit down."

But Wesley did not work out the plan; perhaps he did not intend to. I dare say those quiet reminders of Bobby's lonely supper accused him and he wished to get them out of sight.

"Aren't you going to work out your plan, old man?" Bobby asked later.

"No," said Wesley, annoyed; "don't you suppose I've done work enough to-day. Gee, I've got to rest *some time*."

Bobby said nothing.

One day about a week later Wesley resolved to leave promptly at night and have supper started before Bobby reached the cabin. He was going to make Bobby tell of his contour work down at the Forks. He had heard scarcely a word from Bobby lately about the survey work, and he was going to have a good long evening with his cabin-mate and hear all the news and gossip of the Gulch. He had heard nothing about the captain lately. Bobby, who was in close touch with the powers that be, always had some interesting item about the cap-



tain. The recollection of that lonely cup and saucer and plate lingered with Wesley. . . .

The plain fact is that a slight constraint had grown up between Wesley and Bobby. They had drifted into this state imperceptibly. Neither acknowledged it, but both were conscious of it. The familiar off-hand banter seemed forced and insincere. Bobby felt the same as ever, and I dare say Wesley did. But perhaps Wesley was not altogether sincere with himself. He felt that he must justify himself for his frequent absences, so he told himself that Bobby was an old hermit. And he was very angry and disgusted when one Wesley Binford declined to be comforted by excuses which the other Wesley Binford offered.

It is hard to say how far this slow drifting apart might have gone or how it might have ended if something had not happened to change the whole face of things.

The horn's blast was hardly sounded that evening before Wesley had thrown the canvas covers over his engines and started down the by-path into the Gulch. He was not yet able to tackle the shorter cut down the steep slope of the mezzanine. He was feeling just a trifle nervous; he did not know why unless it was that he anticipated a little embarrassment at having Bobby come in and find him getting supper. What with his overtime on the hill and his evenings with Easter, he and Bobby



had scarcely more than seen each other lately. And he had a feeling that sooner or later one of them must speak openly of this wreck of the old familiar life. He intended to reëstablish that old régime this very night. But it is harder to adjust a strained friendship than to create a new one. Later, Wesley attributed his feeling that evening to presentiment, that strange force which sometimes precedes tangible events and stirs up vague forebodings.

Easter was standing in the doorway as he passed and he paused to chat a moment with her. She wore a gingham apron with bands over her shoulders and he thought she looked very pretty.

"You're early," she said; "I'm waiting for father to come down."

"Yes, I beat the horn to-night."

"You're not ill? Is your foot hurting?"

"No," he said, sitting down on the end of the huge log horse-trough; "just kind of — Do you ever feel kind of — sort of have the fidgets?"

"Kind of feel that something's going to happen? Yes, I know just what you mean. Guess what we're going to have to-night."

"Popovers?"

"Yes, and you've got to stay and have some."

During Wesley's stay at the Merricks' cabin, popovers (a light, hollow, delicious member of the biscuit family) had won a place which they continued to hold in his affection.



"It's a strong temptation," he said, "but I can't stay to-night — I — I've got an engagement."

"Oh, of course," the girl retorted, "if —"

"I don't mean an engagement exactly, but I've got to go home."

"For fear poor little Bobby will be lonesome?"

"Not just that, but — I'm going to cook supper to-night."

"Poor Bobby!" the girl said, mockingly, "whatever did he do before his dear Wesley came? He managed to live here all last year and the year before. I don't believe you're so important to Bobby as you seem to think you are."

"Well, I'm not so important to you either, if it comes to that," said Wesley. Then, as she made no answer, he added, "Am I?"

"Mr. Query, again," she mocked.

"Am I?"

"Do you think I'd be likely to tell you if you were?"

It was very charming and pretty, the way she said it, and the inference which Wesley drew was not unpleasant.

"I never said I was so very important to Bobby," he protested, "but we — somehow — we haven't seen each other nights so much lately."

"And I suppose *I'm* to blame for that."

Wesley felt that she was, indeed, to blame, but he was not going to say so. He felt that she was



more to blame than himself. More than once it had seemed to him odd that this girl should be so blind to the friendship between himself and Bobby.

"No — I don't say any one's to blame, but you don't seem to realize —"

"You're always wanting me to *realize* things! I *do realize* how very important you are to Bobby, and I *do* realize how very important and difficult your work is, and how no one else could do it, and I *do* realize what a horrid noise those beastly engines of yours make, and — and what an important person Mr. Query is getting to be!"

"I never said I was important," said Wesley, flushing a little.

"People don't *say* they're important, they act it. You're getting so all you think about is your old work.— You never even asked what was the matter with my hand."

She allowed a handkerchief-enshrouded finger to become visible out of her enfolding hand.

"I couldn't see it with your fist doubled up; I'm not an X-ray."

"You think it's a joke."

"What is it?" he asked.

"It's a splinter."

"I should think it was," he commented, examining it. "It looks more like a lumber-yard. You'll have the Forestry people after you for stealing timber." He produced a little pair of steel dividers.



"What are you going to do?"

"Take it out."

"You can't — not with that. It'll hurt. Do you think I want to get blood-poisoning? Let go!"

"You won't get blood-poison—"

"*Let go!*"

"They've got oil on them. Don't you know that's an anti— what d'you call it?"

"*Ouch!*"

"Just a minute now," he said, insistingly. "Don't you know when an engineer burns his hand he always puts engine oil on it? It's the best —"

"Ou-u-ch!"

"There," he said, triumphantly, "it didn't hurt, did it?"

"Yes, it did — a lot!"

"Easter," called Mrs. Merrick.

"Will you stay?" the girl asked.

There was a pause. "Do you want me to?"

"You claim to be so fond of popovers — of course, I don't know if you're sincere."

"Do you want me to?"

"Do you want to?"

"Guess," he said.

It was nearly eleven o'clock that night when Wesley reached home. On the way he had argued with himself to such good purpose that he had convinced himself Bobby was a regular old recluse. Still, he



told himself, he would go home early to-morrow night and get supper. It made no difference which night it was so long as he did it. There had been no definite agreement about it so he hadn't broken his word with any one — unless with himself, but that was different.

By the time he came in sight of the little lighted window he had worked himself into quite a defensive attitude. That vague foreboding still possessed him, a kind of hazy presentiment, which made him strangely nervous. It could not be expressed in any better terms than Easter had expressed it. He felt as if something were going to happen. And what else could it be but a quarrel with Bobby? In any event, Wesley had thought the whole thing out, he had been his own good advocate, and he was ready.

Bobby sat drawn up on his cot reading by the lantern whose dim light was not much stimulated by the tin reflector, when the young master of East Hill entered.

“H'lo, Wes.”

“H'lo,” said Wesley; “I was going to come down early and get supper, but I got stalled.”

“Busy?”

“Oh, we manage to keep ahead of the game; had an overflow to-day. Captain sent a fellow up for a job, too. We couldn't use him.”

“He's been hanging around the Gulch for a week, that fellow,” commented Bobby.



"Huh," said Wesley, and began undressing.

Bobby watched him steadily while he removed his coat and shoes, then he spoke. "Wes," said he, "I've been sitting up waiting for you; there's something I want to say."

"I guess I know what it is," said Wesley. "I've got it coming to me. I know how it is. I suppose you mean I haven't taken my turn cooking lately. Well, I know I haven't and it's dead wrong — I see that. Of course, I've got no right to bunk here and let you do all the work — and leave you alone nights." He flung his khaki jacket sulkily into a corner. Bobby watched him quietly.

"But everybody isn't made just alike, you know," Wesley went on. "I work pretty hard daytimes and I've made good —"

"I know you have," said Bobby quietly.

"And, of course, I realize that if it wasn't for you I wouldn't have had that chance —"

"You don't owe me anything, old man."

"Oh yes, I do," it was the better nature of Wesley that said that, "and I don't forget that either, but I'm not like you. I can't sit here reading nights — I never did care for books — stories, I mean. Anyway, I think it's a good thing for a fellow to know a girl — kind of influences him —"

It was precious little Wesley cared about Easter's "influence," and he had never before thought of any such benefits from her acquaintance. I dare



say he had heard the expression somewhere. Bobby smiled a little.

"Well, you can laugh," said Wesley, nettled, "but it does."

"All right, Wes."

"And there's no use getting sarcastic, either," Wesley continued. "Say what you want to say, but leave her out of it."

"Who?"

"You know who."

"I never mentioned any one," said Bobby.

"If you want me to bunk in B Dormitory, say so. What's the use in hinting round? We can be friends just the same — can't we?"

"We'll never be anything else so far as *I'm* concerned, Wes."

"I don't mean to say I want to do it —"

"Then don't speak of it," said Bobby.

"And I don't want you to think it's *all* on account of — the Merricks, either. Sometimes I've stayed till dark, working — and even later."

"Do you think I don't know that?"

"Maybe you think it's an easy job, up there. I can tell you it's been a case of fight this last week. And I'm about all in." He had begun to feel a little ashamed and he said this in self-defense. It seemed to ease his conscience a trifle.

"But I don't say it's all work." (There was an essence of honesty in Wesley which *would* out.)



"I know I've been around evenings with Miss Merrick —"

"Easter?"

"Well, yes — Easter."

"You know I knew her two years ago, Wes, when we first started out here."

"Oh, I know I'm just an L.H. mushroom," said Wesley, with an unpleasant sneer; "but I've done my work. I've worked hard and thought and then worked out my thoughts and — You know what they say," he broke off, "all work and no play — Well, I just can't stick in here night after night for you or anybody else. I don't fall for Jules Verne and that other — what's-his-name?"

"Stevenson?"

"They don't get me. So I suppose we might as well have it out and come to an understanding right now."

"You mean you want to go over to Dormitory, Wes?"

"Did I say that?" said Wesley.

"No you didn't," said Bobby, earnestly, "and I'm glad you didn't."

"Well, what, then?"

"Sit down, Wes," said Bobby, quietly. "There wasn't any need for all this you've been saying. I never complained. I've got no cause to complain. It seems as if I'd known you all my life, old man. What I wanted to say was something else. Will you please sit down — and listen?"



Wesley sat on the edge of his cot, puzzled by Bobby's words no less than by his manner.

"I want you to promise me, Wes, that you won't worry and that you'll leave everything to me. I'm going to tell you something; but first, will you promise?"

"What is it?" said Wesley, apprehensively; "promise what?"

"Promise to do just as I tell you — will you?"

"What's up? Is it — is there any trouble — is —"

"You believe I'm your friend, don't you, Wes?"

"Yes," Wesley conceded, anxiously; "what is it?"

"And will you do as I say?"

"Yes."

"Well, there's a fellow being sent here from Washington, Wes, to take your place."

Wesley breathed quickly. "How do you know?"

"There's a letter down at headquarters. The captain was down at the Forks to-day — he hasn't seen it yet."

"He's C.S.?"

"Oh, sure — was at Panama."

"I've done my work," said Wesley defiantly.

"I know it, Wes, but these things go by rules. We've been through this kind of business before, you know."



There followed a pause.

“Then I — I — I’m going to lose my position?”

“No, you’re not — take that from me!”

Wesley stared at him for a moment. It was a look of utter remorse for the way he had talked and of hopelessness for himself. “There’s no use trying to let me down easy,” he said. “I know I’m only L.H. I know how the government acts — it’s like a big corporation — and it’s politics, too. It’s all over for me.”

He sank down on the cot, a pitiable figure of contrition and despair. He rested his elbows upon his knees and held his drooping head in the palms of his two hands.

Bobby went over to him and tried to remove one of his hands and make him look up. “Wes,” said he, softly, “you came in here to-night expecting to break up our friendship, but you couldn’t — see? Because I wouldn’t let you. Now you’re set on losing your position, but you can’t get rid of either me or your position as easy as you think, Wes.

“Not if I know it,” said Bobby Cullen.



## CHAPTER XV

### THE STORMY PETREL IN ACTION

So this was what it had all come to! To what purpose had he worked and studied and slaved and learned the ways of wild water? "I should have had sense enough to learn the ways of Uncle Sam," he told himself, with a sneer.

All night long he tossed restlessly on his cot. It was all very well for Bobby to talk, but a government order was a government order; and the rule of the government seemed to be that a position should be given to one who was entitled to it by reason of letters and printed records and promotion schedules and Civil Service tests, and so on. Wesley did not understand these things. All he knew was that he had made this position for himself and then had filled it the very best he could.

Well, in any event, his work had served its chief purpose; Harry Arnold was paid — all but three dollars and five cents. If Wesley had known then how he was to earn that small balance, how he would have laughed.

But he was not in laughing mood now, and no encouraging word of Bobby's or recollection of



the captain's laconic promise could comfort him. He knew that in the complicated meshes of the government system, rule was supreme. He was to be simply swept away, crushed, by the heartless, slow-moving government machinery.

"Come on, Wes, get up. Don't grouch around now. Get busy!"

Wesley knew what he was to do. He was going to headquarters with Bobby. He was in Bobby's hands now.

Work was just commencing in the Gulch as the two hurried along. Save for an occasional stroll in the evening, Wesley had never been down to the dam since the day of his arrival in the Gulch. The interior of that little concrete building which perched high up, close by one end of the dam, had been a mystery to him, and a fruitful theme for speculation.

Wesley had always envied Bobby his free access to this imperial place. For Bobby, who beside his regular work was a sort of private secretary to the captain, thought nothing of dropping his transit in a corner here and scanning the open mail.

Wesley had seen the head-engineers about the Gulch; he knew them by sight, the dignified Bronson; the burly, swaggering, off-hand Mr. Barney whom everybody liked; but Bobby's gossiping reports of what went on there, of how Mr. Bronson had said this and the captain had answered so-and-



so, and swung round in his chair, or how Mr. Barney ate sandwiches out of blue-print wrappers and told such and such a joke to Bronson (which Bronson didn't see, as usual), all this had the effect of bringing these exalted personages very clearly into Wesley's vision and he had been fascinated at these delectable glimpses of "behind the scenes" given by the privileged Bobby.

The Stars and Stripes were being raised on the pretty little building, and as Wesley looked at the flag he gave his old cynical chuckle, as if the emblem were a mere mockery. We can forgive him that; he was to learn better.

They went up a narrow iron ladder to the summit of the dam, then along its foot-way and across a tidy little lawn in the center of which were the letters, U. S., formed with red geraniums. Inside the building was the fresh, cool atmosphere diffused by cement. They went up and round and round a spiral iron stairway and into a cool room with blue-prints all over the wall.

Captain Craig sat at one desk, Mr. Barney at another, filling the swivel chair so that his khaki jacket bulged out between its rungs.

"Hello, Wesley," said the captain, surprised but cordial; "so you turned our friend down."

"I really didn't see anything for him to do," said Wesley.

"Well, that's right," said the captain.



Bobby was rooting among a pile of letters on Mr. Bronson's desk. Hauling one out, he brought it over and placed it before the captain. "Did you see that?" he asked.

The captain took it, read it through, then dropped it before him. "Huh," he said, amusedly.

Wesley stood waiting, nervous, fearful as he had been that day at Governor's Island when he awaited the word which meant so much to him. He had come to love the Gulch, and now, in his extremity, all its familiar life seemed dear to him. The calling of men outside, the metallic sound of the great steel crane close at hand, the rattle of the car which was dumping broken stone for the rip-rap work, all these things spoke to him familiarly of a life that was now slipping away. The misunderstanding between himself and Bobby, that seemed as nothing. The friendship of Easter and that of his chum did not seem to knock against each other now; these things would adjust themselves if only he might stay and be a part of all this and go on with the work he had grown to understand and love. He had all he could do to control himself and Bobby's voice sounded strange to him.

"I wanted you to see that, Captain, before any one else had a chance to answer it; and I made Wes come along so he'd be right here and you wouldn't have to send if you wanted him."

Mr. Barney glanced around, then resumed his



figuring and showed no more interest in what took place.

"Yes," said the captain, tersely. "How's the work coming on, Wesley?"

His swivel chair was swung around so that he faced the boys, and he sat back, one knee crossed over the other. Wesley stood before him; Bobby was perched upon a table.

"Oh, it's all right," said Wesley, nervously; "we had a tough week."

"How's your foot?"

"Bothers me some — but not so much."

"It bothers him a good deal," put in Bobby.

Wesley gulped nervously and then spoke. The captain listened, looking straight at him, and waiting patiently when the boy's voice broke and he had to pause before he could go on.

"There's one thing I want to say, Captain. I know how it is in the — the government. And when you said if I did — all right it would be appreciated — I — of course, I knew it meant — by you. But, of course, I know that you're not the government and I'm not so unfair that I'd feel any grudge — I don't mean grudge exactly — but — I guess you know what I mean —"

"I think I do."

"And it's done me a lot of good, anyway — there's that much. It's opened my eyes and —"

"I'm glad it has, Wesley."



"It — it's enabled me to do one thing that you don't know anything about. And it's showed me what I think I'm fitted for. I mean to be an engineer."

"Yes, I think that's your forte."

"I — I see now — I wasted a lot of time — I might have gotten ready and taken Civil Service exams a year ago — only — only —"

"I understand," said the captain; "sit down, Wesley."

For a moment he sat, the finger-tips of his two hands set together, just as he had sat that day at Governor's Island while waiting for Wesley to letter his name.

"I — I've done my best," said Wesley; "maybe if I'd had technical —"

"Bobby," said the captain, briskly, "see if Conway is down stairs. That was all you wished to say to me, Wesley?"

"Except that I thank you; you've given me a start and — and nothing will keep me back now."

"I'm glad to hear you say that."

The boy rose.

"Sit down, Wesley."

A round-shouldered, insignificant-looking young fellow, wearing a shiny alpaca coat, came trotting up the spiral iron steps. He carried a stenographer's note-book and a pencil and somehow, by his familiar clutch of them, gave the impression that



he never ventured forth without this trusty sword and shield. He had an indoors, civilian look, wholly out of keeping with the appearance of the others. For some reason, Bobby, swinging his legs back and forth from the table, winked at Wesley. With a manner of undeviating routine the young man drew a chair up to the table on which Bobby was perched and, troubled as he was, Wesley was conscious of a little amusement, he and Bobby seemed so different. Bobby seldom sat on a chair, there was nothing about him suggestive of humdrum, and he maintained a gay and familiar freedom in the face of authority. He seemed perfectly at home, yet out of place, here. He had the unceremoniousness bred by a life in the open country and of one habituated to being called hundreds of miles at a minute's notice. At present he had a look in his eye as if he were ready to see some fun. Conway was silently deferential.

"Send this to Clausen," said the captain, impersonally.

As he began dictating in his crisp, rapid way, Bobby leered mischievously at Wesley and winked again.

"We are in receipt of your letter of the 2nd inst.," began the captain, "advising us of the departure of a young man, recently from Panama, to assume charge of the erosion work on East Hill.



The work in question is going forward in charge of a very competent young man whom I was fortunate to have by me, and who originated the deflection system which is being followed. He will not be dismissed or reduced without good and sufficient cause. He is scheduled as local help and receiving local-help wages, so I am not aware of any rule being violated (*governmental* rule, say, Conway).

“In connection with this matter, I should like to remind you that a year ago, in our report, the need of competent supervision of these saplings was very strongly emphasized and further urged in a letter sent by myself shortly thereafter. (Give them the date of the report, Conway, and send a copy of the letter.) No attention whatever was paid to these representations. In our report six months ago (given them the exact date, Conway) the destruction of eight per cent. (see if it wasn't *nine*, Conway) of these saplings was set forth and the urgency repeated of the need of some experienced person to control or check this erosive action.

“Reply was made (*belated* reply, Conway) — belated reply was made (give the date) that this would be attended to.

“When I visited the Gulch on my way back from Oregon in February last, I was surprised to hear from Mr. Winters, of the Forestry Bureau, who was visiting the neighboring reservation, that noth-



ing had been done to conserve this planted territory, and he mentioned the amount of loss accruing from this oversight (from this *neglect*, Conway) as probably more than eight thousand dollars. Pursuant to my conversation with him, I visited Washington on my way east and made a very urgent request about what seemed to be regarded there as a rather trifling matter. I mentioned that the work was in charge of foreign laborers.

“After my inspection of the Catskill viaduct at the request of the New York engineers, I accompanied two of my personal assistants up one or two of the smaller New Jersey rivers and returning to New York, received notice to send one of them to Washington forthwith. It had been my intention to place him in charge at East Hill directly upon our arrival at the Gulch if no one had been sent out for that purpose.

“On our arrival in Montana I found that the promise made me in Washington had not been fulfilled, and that no one was in charge upon the slope. I had naturally assumed that the withdrawal (say, *unexplained* withdrawal, Conway) of my assistant would result in some one being sent to the Gulch at once.

“By the last forest inventory twenty per cent. of these saplings had been utterly lost and the work being done to check further loss showed great ignorance and waste. In this predicament I was able,



fortunately, to select from the subordinate staff here a young man who has made this work successful. He will remain in charge there until the rains and freshets subside. I shall take him with me down to the Mississippi.

“When the young man you are sending arrives he will be given such ordinary duties as may require attention, though I may add that there remains very little to be done in the labor force.

(“That’s all, Conway.”)

Conway rose impassively; the letter was nothing to him — no letter was — and had reached the top step of the spiral stairway when the captain called, “One minute, Conway.” Conway mechanically opened his book on the rail of the balustrade.

“P. S.,” said the captain, grimly; “the young man from Panama who was sent here three months since to assist in the grouting was reduced to less important duties by reason of carelessness and incompetency.

(“That’s all, Conway.”)

“Good shot,” ventured Bobby, laconically.

The broad back of Mr. Barney could be seen to shake as he sat at his desk. His face was not visible, but he was undoubtedly chuckling.

The fact is, he himself had won a reputation at Panama.



## CHAPTER XVI

### “ THAT FELLOW, THE MARTYR ”

“ You never saw the captain knock out a home-run before, did you? ” said Bobby as he and Wesley crossed the headquarters lawn.

“ No,” Wesley laughed gayly, “ that *was* a home-run — right off the bat.”

“ He knocks out one like that twice a year, rain or shine,” said Bobby.

“ But when they get it, won't they — ”

“ It'll act like a dose of chloroform. They usually frame the captain's letters. Don't you worry.”

“ I'm not worrying,” Wesley laughed, “ but it gave me a good scare, I can tell you that.”

“ Haven't I got the captain trained? ” Bobby asked, with unconcealed pride; “ I had it all planned out last night. I know him like South Pass.”

Wesley laughed. He found it very easy to laugh.

“ And the funny thing,” continued Bobby, “ is that he thinks he's my boss, when all the time I can make him do just whatever I please. Didn't I chase him to the cabin that morning when he started you up to East Hill? Oh,” he added with a fiendishly



delighted air of self-approbation and triumph, "I've got him *cinched!*"

Wesley laughed again. There was something about Bobby, about his frank complacency regarding his subtle influence at headquarters, his refreshing freedom from any kind of affectation, his habit of taking things as they came and meeting them squarely, his familiarity with high officials and his curious lack of silly pride thereat; there was something about all this that gave him a certain attractiveness which everybody surrendered to by common consent. He had dozens of friends, and yet in a way he had no friend but Wesley.

"Well, it's you who've helped me again," said Wesley, "and only last night—"

"Forget it," said Bobby.

Wesley didn't forget it, but he was satisfied to change the subject. "Do you know, Bobby," said he, "it seems funny to see you without your transit. Whenever I see you, you have it over your shoulder."

"I'm going home to get it," said Bobby; "we're working down near the Forks to-day.—Oh, here comes Mike!" he suddenly vociferated. "Now you'll see some fun!"

A collision between Mike and Bobby always meant fun, and Wesley was never more in the mood for it than just at that minute. The dark cloud which had overhung him all night was dispelled, and



with it had gone whatever of estrangement there had been between himself and Bobby. So he had even gained by the incident. The whole atmosphere seemed to have been cleared. He found it easy to talk to Bobby now. He would also give Miss Easter Merrick a few gratuitous hints on what friendship meant between two fellows. Everything would be all right now. If he had been a little off the path this affair had set him right. He knew the captain had said no more than the plain truth when he had said that the work was being satisfactorily done. And in all reason, why should he not go on with it, and be the young master of East Hill? He was a self-made young man, and when a person is self-made he comes pretty near to knowing it. He would drop into Luke Merrick's for luncheon and tell them all about it, about the captain's "home-run." Should he feel sorry for the young fellow who was coming? Well, in a way, yes; but that was no concern of his. . . .

Mike came along, driving his trusty team. He wore a striped ticking jacket and the advertising buttons upon his ventilated hat had increased in number so that their name was legion. They besought you to vote for So-and-So; they commanded you to eat "Crisplets"; they reminded you that "Mechanic's Delight" was the only tobacco. Several of them said, "Votes for Women." Mike was a walking advertisement.



"Are yez takin' a day off?" he began, by way of opening hostilities.

"Say, Mike," said Bobby, innocently, "did you know that fellow they had a while ago down at the dam was reduced?"

"Oi've enough ter do, mindin' me own business."

"'Ignorance and waste,' the captain said." This was rather a free handling of the captain's dictated phrase, but it did very well.

"The fellow was from Panama," Bobby added.

"Fwhat?" demanded Mike.

"Ignorant and incompetent," said Bobby, laconically.

"Wall, an'—"

"But that isn't the worst, Mike, or rather the best. Query just had a pretty narrow squeak. It's good he's here or we'd have had another one of that Canal bunch dumped on us up East Hill way. What do you think of the nerve of them, honest, Mike?" he urged with an air of friendly confidence; "they started one of those fat-heads out here to take Query's place, but they're not going to get away with it."

"From Panamar?"

"Surest thing you know; that crowd are all hunting jobs. And when he toddles in, Wesley's going to have his fingers crossed—see?"

"Wall, Query's all roight, Oi'll say that much fer 'im—an' I allus said it.—Fwhat will th' other lad do?"



“What *can* he do? He’s not good for anything.”

“Fwhat are ye givin’ me?” shouted Mike. “A feller as wuz undther th’ Ould Man,<sup>1</sup> no good! He’ll hev charrge uv th’ crown worrk, more like!”

“He’ll have charge of a pick and shovel, more like,” said Bobby. “The captain will rubber-stamp *him*, all right.”

“’Tis all roight, an’ Oi’m glad fer Query, if ’tis truth ye’re tellin’, but ye can’t kape a good man down.”

“The captain just sent a pretty little note to Washington, telling them that our tropical friend will be given such chores —”

“Wuz Barney there?”

“Sure; he looked awfully ashamed — I felt sorry for him. *He’s* got some ability anyway, even if he did work down there.”

“Don’t make much difference to me what he does,” said Wesley, laughing at Mike’s perturbation. “I’ll do *my* work, I know that, and I’ll hang on to it, too — Panama or no Panama.”

“They’re brisk lads, thim,” said Mike, ruefully.

“Only they can’t play in our yard,” said Bobby.

“Do Oi know ’im?” said Mike. “Fwhat’s his name?”

“What was his name, Wes?”

“I didn’t see the letter,” said Wesley, “and I

<sup>1</sup> Col. Goethals, familiarly known among the Canal force as the “Old Man.”



don't care much, either; his name is Mud, I guess."

"I think it was Arnold," said Bobby; "sure, that was it — Harry Arnold."

"Fwhat!" roared Mike, "him as wuz wid me on 82?"<sup>2</sup>

"His number's twenty-three, now," said Bobby.

Wesley stood as if petrified. There was a curious sensation in his chest. He bit his lip nervously. He tried to laugh with Bobby at Mike's expression of utter amazement, but it was a sickly laugh.

"I guess you must have hoodooed him, Mike," said Bobby. "Well, so long," he added. "I'm going after my transit."

"W-wait — just a minute," stammered Wesley.

"Can't," called Bobby, hastening off in his usual erratic fashion; "I'm late now."

He had had *his* fun and he left Wesley to further divert himself with Mike. If he had known the mad thought which had broken into Wesley's mind he would have waited.

"Wall, 'twill be good fer th' blues ter see 'im," said Mike, smiling reminiscently and half incredulously. "Be jiggers, th' worrld ain't so big after all!"

"D-do you know him?" Wesley stammered.

"Know 'im? Didn't me and him worrk wid Barney? Know 'im! Him as they called 'Kid'!"

<sup>2</sup> The number of the steam-shovel on which both Harry Arnold and Mike had worked in Panama.



That's him — Harry Arnold. He coom frum Jerrsey, too."

His face seemed radiant with pleasant memories. "An' Oi don't carre much fwhat they set 'im to, nather, s'long's he comes."

He trudged away, the chain traces jangling on the ground, and Wesley watched his retreating figure in a kind of daze. Then he drew himself together and tried to think. The bright, clear sky had lasted but a minute, and again a black cloud overhung him.

He asked himself if he were afraid or ashamed to meet Arnold. He decided that he was not; he had written a letter incriminating himself unmercifully and making promise of restitution; and he had kept the promise. He had kept it under circumstances highly creditable to himself. He had gone penniless (save for the little change left over from his purchases in New York); he had taxed and strained his eyes (his occasional racking headaches testified to that); he had studied, thought, worked, made a place for himself, wedged open an opportunity, gone up on East Hill and —

What? Taken something which did not belong to him; stolen something more from Arnold.

His remorse at what he had done in Oakwood made him morbid.

These were his thoughts as he limped up to his own beloved domain in East Hill. This affair was



no longer one between Captain Craig and Washington; it was between Harry Arnold and himself.

I told you that Wesley's imagination was his good friend. It had given him a feeling of sympathy, which few could comprehend, for that grand, harassed old stump. But it was also his tormentor. Where you find imagination you are apt to find superstition, and Wesley had a conviction now, which he could not overcome, that this was his punishment, his expiation; that he should be permitted to live down the past, make amends, be worthy and useful, have prospects, and then be coldly required by fate to hand these treasures over to the person he had wronged. By all the rules of honest endeavor, intelligence, study, experience, Arnold was entitled to this position. Arnold had come along through the legitimate, prescribed avenues of success, to this place which he, Wesley, held. He, Wesley, had taken a short-cut into it, *sneaked* into it. Oh, how different now seemed that curt letter to Washington!

What would Arnold do? What would he say? What would he think?

As Wesley stooped to correct the mixture of one of his engines, his hand trembled visibly. He hobbled over to the other one.

All day, Harry Arnold in a blue flannel shirt followed Wesley about. He pictured Arnold, laughing and saying, "Forget it," when he spoke



of the letter and the money. He did not know that Arnold had never received either. He did not know that Oakwood believed him dead. He saw Arnold engaged in some ordinary labor while he, Wesley, remained enthroned on East Hill. Of course, Arnold wouldn't blame him — that wouldn't be Arnold.

But had not Arnold suffered quite enough at his hands? Should he keep this position which belonged to Arnold? Had it not served its purpose? How plain was the intent of destiny! He should have this position to make ready for Arnold and at the same time get from it the money with which to pay his debt. Then when the money was paid and the position ready . . .

"I won't give them the chance to humiliate him, to put me above him," he said. You would have supposed that his benefactors were his enemies and that they were in a conspiracy against Arnold.

"I stole his money and I stole his canoe. I — I'm not going to steal his position," he said. "Nobody can make me. I'm not — I'm not a *thief*!"

He sat down on the rough wooden bench beside one of the engines. He had worked himself into quite a state. The little demon chugged merrily away, throwing the water over into Ditch C; the water that had come down in the delusive hope of getting among the trees.

"I'm not a *thief*," he repeated, with a kind of



pitiful resolution. "If — if anybody thinks — I — I'm afraid to meet him — I'm *not* afraid to meet him — but I won't give them the chance — I — I'm *not* a thief!"

He did not look much like the young master of East Hill. He was just Wesley Binford, struggling with this new problem. He was always striving, and doing the best he could. If it wasn't this that filled his eyes and made the Gulch seem a blur beneath him, it would have been weariness or eye-strain — it was always something. . . .

That evening he left early, went home and got his few things together. They were so few that he bunched them up into a piece of tick, like a peddler's pack. As he hobbled along with this through the quiet, dusk-enshrouded Gulch, a score of people saw him who, with a little laugh and a friendly word, might have turned the course of his future life. But they thought that Query was on his way to Laundry Cabin. One of them, a woman looking from her cabin door while waiting for the supper to cook, remarked to her husband that Query still limped, that she believed he would always limp. From the Merricks' cabin rose a cheerful and inviting smoke; perhaps they were going to have popovers for supper.

He went up the by-path to his own East Hill. He adjusted the tarpaulin covers on his two engines;



he replenished one of the tanks from a gasoline supply can. Then he opened the little sluice to Ditch B as he always did when the engines were not running. Then he went on up the hill, carefully over the logs which spanned the main catch-ditch. He would make his way to the nearest city. He could do that somehow. In the city he could earn a little money, as a laborer, perhaps; and so get to something else. One has to live.

The trail was not so easy to find in the gathering darkness as he had thought it would be, but he picked it out at last, and hurrying along with that characteristic limp by which he favored his injured foot, was soon enveloped in the dense forest.



## CHAPTER XVII

### ANOTHER DISAPPEARANCE

It was Walters, of the Topographic Squad, who went down with the buckboard and met Harry Arnold at Gulch Station.

"I liked him the minute I saw him," Walters told Captain Craig later.

The disappearance of Wesley had caused wonder among the few who saw him daily, but the news of it had not been disseminated generally through the Gulch's community, for it had only just occurred at the time of Harry's arrival. At headquarters Captain Craig was dumbfounded; he questioned Bobby who told him all he knew, and then sent for Mike, he being the last person known to have conversed with Wesley. Then he sat back, thought a few minutes, shook his head in perplexity, and gave it up as a puzzle. He was annoyed as well as mystified, for he had entertained high hopes of Wesley. But a man with Captain Craig's engrossing duties could not afford to cogitate long on such a matter. East Hill was but an item of his multifarious responsibilities, and the riddle of the boy's uncere-  
monious departure was soon laid by in the practical



consideration of who should do the work, and Wesley's purpose was successful in that, at least, for the position fell naturally to Harry Arnold. Wesley had done for him what no one else could have done, for with the Stormy Petrel down in that little cement building, Wesley's position would have been as dependable as the Rock of Gibraltar.

In the course of time Harry heard about the young fellow, Query, who had previously had charge of the work and who had gone away suddenly, but it never occurred to him that he had to thank that same Query for the position which he held. His salary, instead of twenty-five dollars was ninety dollars a month. He had not Wesley's original difficulties for he found the work in running condition, and it was to the credit of Wesley that Harry saw nothing to alter by way of improving and facilitating the work. There were little things here and there which his experience and technical training enabled him to improve, but nothing in the nature of a sweeping change. For Mike Kerrigan was right, engineers are born, not made, and East Hill was an irrefutable witness that Wesley Binford was born to be an engineer.

For several days after Harry's arrival it was like a reunion of old home folks what with his meeting with his old "boss," Mr. Barney, and the vociferous welcome which he received from Mike. It made him feel quite at home. Captain Craig, too, greeted



him cordially and with a sense of the fitness of things turned him over to Mr. Barney and washed his hands of East Hill altogether. Harry regarded the captain with unconcealed admiration, little knowing he had stood between himself and his position.

It was not long, however, before he began to feel an undercurrent of bias against him among the unreasoning element, who regarded him as a sort of usurper of the throne of their young hero, Query. He did not know the cause of this irrational dislike and it puzzled him and troubled him. If you wish to see loyalty carried to the point of prejudice you have to observe the young ladies, and Easter Merrick treated Harry with dignified scorn as if he had stolen East Hill from its rightful owner.

Bobby, too, resented Harry's advent and studiously avoided making his acquaintance. His attitude toward the new arrival was wholly unreasonable, but Bobby was only human (and very human at that), and it got on his nerves, as he said, to see the complacent way in which Arnold had taken up the work. He could not bear to see him going to and from East Hill; he could never think of that spot as belonging to any one but Wesley, and he fancied Harry a pushing, heartless fellow who thought of nothing but his own advantage.

He suspected that Wesley had gone away for fear the captain would still be over-ruled by Washington, and to save himself the humiliation of having to



back down after all. If Bobby cherished any resentment toward Wesley it was that he believed his chum had not placed sufficient confidence in the captain. For the rest, he looked upon this "Panama prig," as he called Harry, as the cause of all that had happened, as one who had come to reap where Wesley had sown, the usurper of his friend's opportunity and the destroyer of a friendship.

In his state of mind it was easy to feed this prejudice with all sorts of plausible notions and he asked himself why Arnold, if he was really such a fine fellow as Mike said he was, did not inquire who had planned this work on the hill, why he did not praise the skill of his predecessor, and display some curiosity about the lame fellow, Query, who had looped the great rock on the mezzanine and out-maneuvered the wild water on East Hill. It never occurred to Bobby that he had given Harry no chance to exhibit such interest.

Bobby lived alone now with only his harmonica to console him, and in his loyalty to his departed friend, he grouped all Panama men into a sort of band of conspirators, Mike, Mr. Barney, Arnold, and all, thriving on hollow reputations, and he viewed them all with a kind of tolerant contempt which greatly amused Captain Craig, no less than Mr. Barney himself.

So it fell out that the young fellow who had been so popular down at the Isthmus, whom everybody



had always liked wherever he went, found himself to some extent in an atmosphere of coldness, where one or two markedly avoided him and others showed no inclination to make friends with him.

It was among the unskilled force and largely among the women that he noticed this for many of these people had instinctively adopted Bobby's view of the matter and looked upon Query as in some way a martyr to official red tape and heartless system.

At headquarters it was different. Mr. Barney knew Harry of old and they were stanch friends. Captain Craig, too, was quick to perceive his good qualities, and liked him; and Walters, who had never seen much of Wesley, cultivated Harry and liked him immensely.

Nevertheless, the boy's position in the Gulch was not a comfortable one. His nature was social, frank and open. With all respect to Mr. Bobby Cullen, there was no suggestion of the "prig" about him. He could not understand why people would not meet him half way. Bobby, I am sorry to say, allowed his prejudice and disappointment and his fondness for Wesley to run away with his good sense and his avoidance of Harry ran to the point of rudeness.

But Bobby had something on his mind which no one knew, and he was scarcely himself. Among other honors which his likable personality had brought him was the treasurership of the Gulch Min-



strels, an association of some dozen or more of the Gulch's people formed to supply the beguilements of music, song and other forms of entertainment, in the evenings. It fell to the Gulch Minstrels to see that all national holidays were properly celebrated, and the spacious Supplies Cabin was their theater. Here might be heard the plaintive notes of Mike's accordion, and on these high-day occasions one of the engineers usually made a speech.

In Bobby's cabin was an old chest of drawers and in the top drawer was a tin box in which he kept his smaller instruments. There was the drawing set which Wesley used to use, a jewel-set mariner's compass, and other small things. Here also he kept the modest funds of the Gulch Minstrels.

It was about two or three weeks after Wesley's departure that Bobby opened this box to balance up his little account prior to a meeting of the Minstrels. The twenty-odd dollars which should have been there was gone. There was no lock to the box; he and Wesley had both used it, and the only safeguard they had ever had against robbery was the lock on the cabin door, and the proximity of the cabin to the Supplies Cabin, whose occupants were always about.

For a day Bobby tried not to think of Wesley in connection with the loss, but certain obstinate facts kept obtruding themselves into his mind. Wesley had had no money, he knew, for he had sent away



all he had received — to his parents, Bobby supposed, although Wesley had never spoken of them.

How could he have gone away without money? Where could he hope to get to? At evening Bobby went into the little Post Office cabin, and asked the paymaster if Wesley had tried to draw what was due him at the time of leaving. He learned that there was a small sum due Wesley, which he had not asked for and which he would not have received at the time if he had asked for it. He went back to his cabin and ate his lonely supper, sick at heart. Not for one moment, he told himself, would he suspect Wesley, but he was sick at heart all the same.

He passed such a night as he hoped never again to pass as long as he lived, and in the morning he awoke, or rather arose, with that vague, unconquerable doubt still haunting him, and with a new complication to make matters worse.

The next night was meeting when he must render his account. What should he say? What would these people think? What would be the logical inference? They would suspect his friend. He could browbeat and subdue his own doubts and fears. His fondness for Wesley and the memory of their friendship was strong enough for anything; strong enough to make him prejudiced and irrational, and even rude; strong enough to throttle suspicion and renounce the logical inference. But how about these other people, whose money was gone? They



would put this and that together and shake their heads meaningly and reflect that their treasurer's cabin-mate was gone too; gone without leave or explanation; not gone as most people go, but *disappeared*. And it happened that Bobby had no money of his own on hand. He had little use for it and most of it went home by money order. If he had the sum he could render his account and then . . .

Why, then just go on worrying, and beating down these persistent thoughts, and tossing on his lonely cot in his lonely cabin, the same as before.

He must publish the fact of this embezzlement the next night, and let people think what they would. He knew what *he* would think, and that was that his friend was as honest as . . .

Poor Bobby; it was too much for him; and when, after a day of torment, the evening of the meeting was at hand, he was hardly better than a wreck. For a moment he had a wild thought of not going to the meeting, of sending word that he was tired out and sick. It would have been no more than the truth. But then the instinctive feeling took possession of him that a person who is responsible for money and who is to render an account of it, has no business to be tired out and sick. Besides, how would delay help matters? Would it bring him the money?

On his way into the Gulch he stopped, resolved to tell the captain. The captain believed in Wesley;



but suppose *he* should look doubtful or suspicious.

The complacent Conway in his shiny alpaca sat at his table as Bobby went in and it made him furious that Conway seemed so impassive and disinterested. Conway never had any worries. "If I dictated a letter to Conway," thought Bobby, "and said there were sixteen murders and forty-'leven suicides to-day, he'd just take it down and say, 'Is that all?' "

Half way up the spiral stairs he turned around and went down again and out among the crown-work men who were just going home. He could not tell the captain.

Should he tell Mike? Mike was a sensible, shrewd Irishman who often made good suggestions. But he was one of that Panama gang. . . .

Poor Bobby.

No, he could not tell any one. Yet in three or four hours he *must* tell every one. There was still time to go back and tell the captain, and he paused, irresolute. Then he went on homeward to get his supper.

And of all the people in the Gulch whom do you suppose that Bobby Cullen made a confidant of that evening?



## CHAPTER XVIII

### FRIENDS IN NEED

HARRY ARNOLD came down the by-path on his way home from the hill that evening. Easter was outside the Merrick cabin and he bowed and slackened his pace as if to speak with her; but she did not encourage him at all, and presently he was in the embarrassing position of standing there alone, for Easter had disappeared within the cabin.

Harry was not accustomed to being snubbed by girls and he was a little hurt and very much puzzled. What could be her reason? If Gordon Lord had been there he would doubtless have been able to enlighten him out of his own wide experience and observation, and tell him that a girl does not have to have a reason; that she can do very well without one. Harry had been properly introduced to Easter and it was a wholly new experience for him to be slighted in this way. He wondered what he had done or failed to do to lay himself under this girl's displeasure.

However, there was nothing for him to do but go on; so he walked on, thinking of this odd treatment, and before he had gone very far he resolved



on a bold course of action which was very characteristic of his frank nature. He could not intrude himself upon the girl, but he could intrude himself upon that other person who had so conspicuously ignored and snubbed him. He would take the bull by the horns and speak to Bobby Cullen.

With this resolve he went on past his own dormitory and straight to Bobby's cabin. Easter's snub was the immediate incentive and he was glad that an incentive had presented itself. There was no tinge of self-consciousness or hesitancy about Harry; his inherent sincerity always took him straight to the root of a matter and he had the openness and the courage which knows no silly embarrassment.

Hence it was that as Bobby set the coffee-pot on his little makeshift table he became conscious of that obnoxious figure in the doorway. If Harry had only known it, it was a most unpropitious moment for a call, for Bobby was beset with the worry which had haunted him all day, and the thought of the meeting not two hours away. It is also a fact, for which I can assign no possible justification, that the loss of this money and the misgivings and anxieties which it engendered in Bobby had set him still more resolutely against the new master of East Hill. So Harry's appearance had rather the effect of waving a red flag before the bull than of taking him by the horns.



"Hello," said he, cordially.

"H'lo," grunted Bobby.

"Busy?"

"Busy enough."

"May I sit down?"

Bobby looked as if he rather admired his nerve. "Guess there's no law against sitting down," he said.

"Well, if there is I'll break the law," said Harry, pleasantly. "I'm pretty tired."

"Nothing to be tired about that I can see," said Bobby, coldly. "East Hill about runs itself now; all *you've* got to do is stand and watch it."

Harry perched himself on Bobby's couch, drew his knees up and clasped his hands over them. "Thanks to the fellow that planned it," he said, cheerfully.

There followed a pause while Bobby stood before his little oil-stove. "Did you want to see me?" he asked gruffly.

"More than that," said Harry; "I want to be friends with you."

"I've got friends enough."

"Well, I haven't — not here," Harry said.

"Barney — and the rest of that Canal bunch," suggested Bobby, sarcastically.

"Guess Mr. Barney has no time to bother with me," Harry laughed.

"Thought you and he were side-partners."



"No — I used to help him sling dirt, that's all."

"Huh," sneered Bobby.

"Mike and I are pretty good friends," said Harry, ignoring Bobby's rudeness; "it reminds me of old times every time I look at him; he's just the same as he used to be. It used to be his citizenship papers he'd be waving in our faces; now it's his C.S. certificate."

"There's many a good man been knocked senseless by a C.S. certificate."

Harry did not quite understand this, and he looked at Bobby, puzzled. Also for the first time, Bobby took a good look at Harry, and he was disgruntled to find nothing in the new boy's appearance to justify his dislike of him. He noticed the big bronze coin which hung on the gold chain that disappeared in the pocket of his khaki shirt. Harry's sleeves were rolled up and displayed two brown arms. There was no suggestion of prig about him. Moreover, Bobby realized that Harry was more at ease than he was himself. Now that they were face to face and he saw this strange boy to speak to, he had an uncomfortable feeling of Harry's being on the right side and of himself being on the wrong side; for there was no good explanation to sustain his prejudice. He knew the bronze coin for one of the Panama award medals, given for two years' faithful service on the Isthmus. He knew that it bore the words, "Presented by the



President of the United States," and yet the fellow who had won this medal turned the matter off by saying that he had helped Mr. Barney sling dirt. In short, Harry did not fit into the rôle which Bobby had given him at all. More than this, he seemed to have a uniform cheerfulness and frankness about him which contrasted rather favorably with Wesley's tendency to moods.

"Look here, Cullen," said Harry, "what's the matter? Why can't we be friends? There's no trouble with you, that's sure —"

"Oh, I have troubles all right," said Bobby.

Harry hesitated and looked at him curiously. "I meant the fault isn't with you. You're popular, everybody likes you. I hear about you all over, down at headquarters — Mr. Barney, the captain, everybody. It's 'Bobby Cullen' wherever I go. Walters says you make friends wherever you go; so the trouble must be with me. I don't ask to be chums with you, but just friends enough to — to speak and be pleasant. And if there's anything to prevent I want to know it. I can't for the life of me think what it can be. I've heard that fellow — Query, is it? — that used to be up on the hill bunked down here with you and I've tried to dope out something from that, but I can't seem to fit things together. So I thought I'd come right to headquarters. Of course, you don't have to be friends with me if you don't want to, but if it's going to



go on like this I think I'm entitled to know why; don't you?"

"Suppose so," Bobby conceded.

"When I first heard about you," Harry went on, "I thought you'd be just the one to ring in on a little scheme of mine. You know I'm mixed up with the Boy Scouts at home and I've got the detective bee. We're all daft on 'deduction,' you know; General Baden Powell got us started.— Well, right down here at the Forks is an old Lewis and Clarke camp; of course, you know that —"

"No, I didn't," admitted Bobby.

"Well, there is, Bo— Do you know, I was just going to call you Bobby! Narrow escape, hey?"

Bobby said nothing, but smiled slightly in spite of himself.

"Everybody seems to," said Harry. "Well, there's an old cache in the earth somewhere down there, full of all sorts of ginges, and I had a notion of trying to find it. They couldn't find it themselves on the way back. Ever read anything about Lewis and Clarke?"

"Not much."

"Wouldn't it be a stunt to find that cache? There were some sunflower seeds in it, and I thought they might have got tired of lying there and come up. I understand you surveyors find old beaver mounds on dried up territory down there.



We might stumble on it that way, too, hey? ‘Aim at the goose and hit the gander.’ ”

The time came when Bobby remembered that expression “*We may aim at the goose and hit the gander.*” He had to admit that Harry was rather refreshing. The candor with which he spoke of the restraint between them, his readiness to sweep it all away in good comradeship, took Bobby at a disadvantage.

Here was a fellow who had won a medal at Panama, who was as closely in touch with Mr. Barney as he, Bobby, was with the captain, who had quietly taken the position which he had been given and had done his work unostentatiously and in the face of slight and rudeness, who was apparently utterly without conceit or arrogance, and who had withal a touch of romance which sent him off on the most cock-a-hoop quests with a gusto which was delightful. Here he was whom Bobby had snubbed, perched with his knees up on Bobby’s couch, inviting him to go in search of buried treasure!

“I couldn’t do it alone, you know,” said Harry; “there’d have to be two — Lewis and Clarke.”

“’Fraid there isn’t much chance,” said Bobby.

“You never can tell, Bo— There I go again!”

“Guess it wouldn’t kill me,” said Bobby.

“You never can tell. Down in Pan I had a parrot — got him yet — he has a name so long you



have to wind it up on a spool — and he gave me a lot of gibberish about bags of gold, and a whole bunch of us went down the Isthmus a ways and rooted out fifty pounds of gold dust — and a skeleton.”

“What?” said Bobby, incredulously.

“Sure as you live — ask Mike. My parrot boarded with Mike while I was gone. — You couldn’t buy that parrot; Andrew Carnegie couldn’t buy him.”

“I thought things like that only happened in books.”

“You ought to have known my friend, Mr. Conne — motion-picture man. He was ‘filming up’ the Isthmus, as he called it; and I tell you what, Bo-bby (there it goes, right out in meeting!) I tell you what, if you’re in for adventures you ought to have known *him*. You could dump that man off Mount McKinley and he’d land right side up, with care.”

Bobby laughed. “You seem to have your share of adventures,” he said.

“Well, we’re friends, then?” said Harry.

“Guess there’s no other way to fix it,” said Bobby, with rather an ill grace. “Have — have you had your supper?” he asked, after a pause.

“No, go ahead and eat,” said Harry. “I’ll just sit here.”

“There’s one thing I’d like to say,” said Bobby,



hesitatingly. "You spoke of that fellow who bunked here. He was my friend — and he is yet. Even if I should never see him again, he's my friend."

"Yes?" said Harry.

"He never had any technical training; he was what we call a pick-up, or Local Help. They have no standing with the government; but he was a kind of a genius; you know, it isn't always the colleges that make engineers —" Bobby spoke in a low tone and very earnestly. "I — I don't know just exactly how to tell you, but somehow we got to be very close friends. He was funny about some things. They called him 'Query' because he used to ask so many questions. You see, he had no training so — so he just watched and asked questions. And all of a sudden, as you might say, he planned out East Hill. He saw the whole thing in his mind and he went up there and made it as you see it. Captain Craig says he was a natural-born engineer — but he won't be an engineer now. — He was funny about some things. Some said the name 'Query' fitted him all kinds of ways; but that was because — because he did things his own way."

"I see," said Harry, quietly.

"I don't know why he went away, but I guess it was because he couldn't stand for being thrown out. — He wouldn't have been thrown out, though," he added, more vehemently, "because there's a



man down at headquarters who'd have prevented it; and you'd have gone to work wherever he could have put you."

"Captain Craig?"

"Captain Craig," said Bobby.

"He'd have been right," said Harry.

"He'd have had his way," said Bobby, somewhat vindictively. "Barney couldn't have helped you either."

"I shouldn't have asked him to," said Harry.

"Well," said Bobby, after a moment, "I guess you're not such a bad sort. But there's a reason why I'm telling you this. I couldn't look at you without thinking of that fellow limping away to make room for you. I heard you were rich."

"Limping?" Harry asked.

"Yes. When he went away from here he took a lame foot that will always be lame. Didn't you hear about his looping a big rock on the mezzanine that would have crashed into Luke Merrick's cabin? Sometimes they called him 'Lame Query.'"

It was hard for Bobby to come to his point and Harry waited with his big gray eyes fixed soberly on the speaker.

"Well, I don't suppose you're to blame, but I guess it's the same with Easter as it is with me — more so, maybe, for I guess he liked her pretty well."

"You mean that Merrick girl?"



“Yes. But this is what I wanted to say to you, and it will show whether you are really a good sort or not.”

“If you can find him, the job is his,” said Harry.

“It isn’t that; I can’t find him. I guess we’ll never hear of him again. But in a day or two you may possibly hear suspicions cast against him — that money from this cabin was missing. It’s got to come out that it’s missing, because it’s association funds and I’ve got to account for it to-night. — But this is what I want you to understand,” he went on, emphatically. “*He didn’t take it. I know* he didn’t. He never did a dishonest thing in his life! Do you understand that? I want you to say you won’t believe it — that you won’t pay any attention —” He broke off and buried his face in his folded arms on the table.

When he raised his head, Harry was still perched on the couch, watching him with sympathy in every line of his countenance. “You say you *know* he didn’t?”

“And I repeat it!” said Bobby, defiantly. “It was taken out of the tin box in that drawer — twenty-two dollars.”

“The top drawer?”

“Yes, I never use the lower one except when I’m going away. It’s got our duffel bags and things in it.”

Harry rose and walked over to the chest. The



lower drawer bore two pull-handles, but one of the handles of the upper drawer had retired many years before. "Mind if I look in?" he asked, as he carelessly took the two handles in his two hands and opened the drawer. Bobby looked in, a little puzzled. The once carefully packed contents were in disorder.

"You say you haven't been to this drawer lately?" asked Harry.

"N-no; not since the day we came to the Gulch last. Then I packed it."

Harry whistled thoughtfully. "Looks as if you're right then, doesn't it?"

"What do you mean?"

"Money must have been taken by some one who didn't know which drawer it was kept in."

If Bobby had been notified of the inheritance of a fortune, he could not have been more overjoyed than at the utterance of this simple sentence. For away down in his heart he wanted, needed, something practical to verify the belief that he was resolved to maintain. He regarded this strange boy as a deliverer. What a mind he had! How boyish and yet how observant and acute! How childishly enthusiastic and yet how sober and sympathetic he could be!

"I—I thank you," Bobby said, weakly.

"Let's see you open the other one," Harry said. Bobby took hold of the single handle toward the



end of the upper drawer and by a perceptibly diagonal pull, hauled the drawer open.

"Shut it again. Now pull the handle straight just as if there were two. Doesn't open, does it? Pull hard that way. She'll split pieces off the end before she opens; see there?" He held up a little piece which had chipped off the resisting end of the old soft wood drawer.

"There's where another chip came off lately," he said. He felt underneath the chest. "And there's the chip," he added, triumphantly. "Both you fellows knew enough to pull sideways where there was only one handle, didn't you? Well, see here, where some one tried to jab a pen-knife in for another handle, and then yanked it out sideways after all and chipped a piece off the end into the bargain; all because they didn't know the little trick. Guess you're right, my boy; a stranger's been in here.—But that isn't catching him, is it?"

"I don't care anything about catching him; what I care about is —"

"I understand," said Harry. "If I were you I wouldn't give any one a chance to suspect your friend. Why don't you just make it good? *You* know he didn't take it, and *I* know he didn't."

"You mean it?"

"Sure. It's the little tiny facts that don't lie," said Harry. "They're good enough for me. And *you* don't need even those," he added; "you've got confidence in your friend."



"Yes, I have," said Bobby, emphatically.

"The only thing that can smash confidence is a fact, and these two cute little facts happen to be on our side. Maybe, they're not very big—but they're on our side."

"You say *our* side?"

"Sure, I'm with you." He resumed his informal attitude on the couch. "Confidence and two dinky little facts on one side; nothing on the other side but a coincidence. I'm with you.—Have you got twenty-two dollars handy?"

"No—that's the trouble—I haven't."

"Then it's lucky I have—"

"I wouldn't be owing you—"

"You're not the only person here that's got confidence," said Harry. "Give *me* a chance to show a little. There's no way to spend money in this blamed old Gulch anyway. I'd give half a dollar for an ice cream soda.—Here, ten, fifteen, and five's twenty and two is twenty-two. Take it—or the people will think *I* stole it. They saw me coming in here."

Bobby laughed, reluctantly taking the money. "Till the ghost walks," he said.

"Till the robins nest again, for all I care."

"Will you let me look at that medal a minute?" Bobby asked.

"Sure. If it wasn't for my friend, Carleton Conne, I wouldn't have that. He took Uncle Sam by the whiskers and made him give it to me."



“I guess you earned it all right.”

“I guess I’ve got it all right,” Harry laughed, springing down to go. “Well, good luck to you, Cullen, I’ll see you later; and I’m going to get you to square me with Miss —”

“I’ll tend to that. Mike says you ought to have two medals.”

“Oh, sure, I ought to have my hat covered with them — like he has. You’re not such a fool as to swallow all Mike tells you?”

“It’s all right if it’s pre-digested,” laughed Bobby. “By the way, wouldn’t you like to join the Minstrels? The head minstrel would be only too glad to have you.”

“Who is the head minstrel?”

“I am. That’s how I happen to know how he’d feel.”

Harry was just in the doorway and about to go when he bethought him to ask, “What was your friend’s real name?”

“His name was Binford — Wesley Binford,” said Bobby.



## CHAPTER XIX

### A DISCOVERY

*He never did a dishonest thing in his life.*

That was the sentence that stayed in Harry's mind as he went away from Bobby's cabin. That was the sentence, uttered with all Bobby's confident assurance, that spoiled his happiness at his success with Bobby. And those two happy little facts about the drawer did not quite suffice to cheer him.

So he was right after all. Wesley was not dead; he had come here by some hook or crook and made a reputation for himself. The facts which he had deduced in Oakwood had proved Harry right and the mighty Blauvelt wrong. Wesley lived, and had been here; had planned the work which he was now carrying on. In a way it was a triumph for Harry.

But it was a triumph which depressed and troubled him. What was he to think? What could any one think? Harry had a clear, sensible mind, and he could not wholly avoid the natural inference.

When he had gotten over his first astonishment he thought over all that had happened from the very first. It seemed very ample and convincing;



it seemed to laugh at those two poor little deduced facts which had so relieved Bobby.

Wesley had ruined his canoe, taken his money and disappeared. Oakwood believed him dead. But Harry had believed him to be living, for there was the black spot on the canoe and facts, be they little or big, as he had said, *do not lie*. He had depended upon those signs and they had not deceived him. Wesley lived; he was the "Lame Query" of Long Gulch; but no word from him had ever come to Harry.

What was he to think?

Wesley had gone from Oakwood and money was missing. He had never offered restitution or explanation; and when he learned that Harry was coming to Long Gulch he had again disappeared, and more money was missing.

What was he to think?

Was Query indeed a genius? So it seemed; but a genius with a kink in his mind, a vein of weakness running in him; a bright diamond with a fatal flaw.

He tried to beat down this thought, but it rose persistently in his mind, and the sum of all his thinking was a feeling of sympathy for poor, deluded Bobby Cullen.

And yet —

The little facts would not quite down in his mind, either. Why should anybody hunt for money in



a place where he knew it was not kept? Why should a person try to open a drawer in a way he knew it could not be easily opened? He might have been in a hurry; well, that would be all the more reason why he should save time by going to the right drawer and opening it in the usual way. The signs had borne him out once; he had trusted them in face of laughter and skepticism. . . .

And yet —

Oh, what was the use of thinking about it? If those little signs tended to save him from one suspicion, they did not wipe out the other. There was something sordid about the whole business, first and last. Missing money, disappearance; disappearance, missing money.

Harry was utterly sick with the conclusion that forced itself upon him.

Wesley Binford was a —

“But Bobby Cullen shall not know,” he thought. “He shall have the memory of his lame Query, his engineering genius, his honest friend, to cherish forever. I’ll see to that.”

The next morning he rose early with a headache, but with the reflection that through all this miserable business he had won Bobby Cullen for a friend, and Bobby should have those two gratifying little bits of deduction to console him even if he must lay them by. By way of diverting his thoughts he wrote a letter to Marjorie Danforth. He made



no mention of Wesley, but just told her all about his life in the Gulch. But at the end, by way of postscript, something prompted him to say, "I guess, Marje, you were right about Wesley Binford. Maybe he doesn't deserve to have any one defending him. I've been thinking it over, and I've come to the conclusion that you're right — as usual. So don't say I didn't give in."

On his way up to the hill he stopped to mail this letter in the Post Office cabin. As he was going out, "Pop," who among other things attended to the duties of postmaster, called after him and shoved a long envelope through the barred window. "Ought'er been sent by freight," he observed good-naturedly.

"I should think so," laughed Harry; "guess it's my grand piano."

Outside he opened it. It enclosed two sealed envelopes, a loose piece of smudgily printed paper about the size of an ordinary blotting sheet, and a folded sheet of note paper in his sister's handwriting, which said:

DEAR HARRY: —

I've been meaning to write, but we are so busy getting the house cleaned that it's impossible to do *anything*. Mother says I simply *must* forward you these mysterious epistles that have been standing on your bureau obscuring the photograph of — *you know who*.



I didn't *dare* to open them for fear of your wrath, but I'm eaten up with curiosity. Who in the *world* do you know in North Dakota? I'm going to write you a terrifically long letter soon.

Winfield Parks (or *Brick*, I suppose I ought to call him — but I think it's perfectly dreadful) — I see him every day down at the station, and yesterday Roy was there too. They were both *on top* of a freight car, hammering. Did you ever hear of such a thing? There is something mysterious going on. Mother says she hopes you won't join a ranch and stay out West. Isn't mother too killing? Father's rheumatism is better. Gordon wants me to send you this *extraordinary* paper and says to please send a dollar! Isn't he excruciating?

Lots of love, in dreadful haste,

MARGARET.

The "extraordinary paper" was a typical specimen of the exquisite art printing done on the famous G. Lord Hand Press, which printed all the Oakwood Scout literature. The lines ran up and down, undulating like a wavy sea, carefully avoiding the horizontal. Sometimes the spaces were between the words and sometimes they were in the middle of the words. Sometimes a word strayed out of the procession altogether like some lagging urchin in a Sunday School parade. The large type of the display sentences had been reinforced



with tiny letters here and there which crouched timidly between their huge, bold-faced companions. But if there was a deficiency of display type, there was a generous superabundance of ink. The document was not only a delight to the eye, but had apparently a value, for it read:

This certifies that Harry Arnold is the owner of One Share  
of Preferred Stock in the

BUSY BEAVERS AMALGAMATED, CONSOLIDATED  
WESTWARD-HO SYNDICATE

Transferable only on the books of the Syndicate by the holder hereof in person or by attorney, upon surrender of this Certificate, properly endorsed.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, the said Syndicate has caused this Certificate to be signed by its duly authorized officers, and to be sealed with the seal of the Syndicate.

PRICE, ONE DOLLAR.

The left-hand corner of the paper bore a large red seal, and it was signed by G. Lord and two other members of the Oakwood Scouts. Harry chuckled, as he frequently did when he heard from Gordon. He had not the slightest idea what the paper meant, but he would assuredly send the dollar. Without a doubt, there would be some interesting developments.

The first envelope which he opened was soiled and stiff, and had evidently been saturated with



muddy water. It contained Wesley's long letter, and Harry read the self-lashings of the awakened conscience which would have no mercy on itself. Every crude sentence stamped it as sincere. He read it twice and it affected him deeply. It showed him the real Wesley Binford. Then he opened the other one, and there was the real Wesley Binford too; the same careless, improvident, rash Wesley Binford whom he had known; for he had enclosed two twenty-dollar bills and one ten in an unregistered envelope and mailed it with characteristic disregard of the risk.

It was not for a little while that it dawned upon Harry why Wesley had thrown down his work and left the Gulch. Then he knew what Wesley had been capable of and he saw him for what he really was.

Oh, if he could only have recalled that letter to Marjorie! How quickly he would have changed the postscript! For again his conviction was right. But he would write again, and tell her all about it and at the end he would add another postscript which should simply quote his own words to her, *How about that fellow, the martyr?*

The next evening, which was Saturday, Harry dropped in at Bobby's cabin. He was in a particularly gay mood; to be sure, his knowledge of the sacrifice which Wesley had made for him did



not tend to make him comfortable in his new position, and all day long the boy who had gone away had haunted him accusingly as he did his work. He felt that he was the murderer of Wesley's prospects and opportunity. But at least he saw Wesley in his true light, and the little facts which do not lie had borne him out again.

"Hello, Robertus," he called. "I've come to supper; is it all right?"

It was all right.

"Do you know, I've been thinking more about that friend of yours, and I think it's up to you and me to find him. The more I think of it the more certain I am that a tramp's been in here.— Everything all right about the funds?"

"Oh, yes, and that twenty —"

"Forget it, I've got fifty here so don't worry. Why, man, I'm rich — I'm buying stock! Look at that!"

"What in the world is it?"

"Westward Ho Amalgamated Syndicate Stock."

"What's that?"

"I haven't the slightest idea — cost me one bean. I may get a thousand in another year — and then again, I may not. I bet I get a hundred per cent. dividends in fun, anyway. That was issued by a kid friend of mine, and he's got as many schemes in his head as any Wall Street man *you* ever saw. Maybe you'll see him some day. Well, now,



Robertus, to-morrow is Sunday and that's my day for a long walk. 'Commune with Nature,' as What's-his-name says. Are you in on it? I'm going after that cache."

Bobby laughed. "I suppose you've deduced just where it is by now. You're a wonder," he added, with genuine admiration. The chest of drawers had made a reputation for Harry in the mind of Bobby.

"Why, no, I won't bother with that till I get there — just kindergarten work, you know. — You want to boil your water before you put your coffee in, old man — scout fashion. Do you ever cook rice? Now, you wouldn't suppose that just from seeing the second finger of your left hand I can tell that you saved that friend of yours from drowning — way over east somewhere."

Bobby dropped a plate on the floor and stared.

"Just roll up your sleeve a little," said Harry, pleased at the success of his somewhat random shot. "Sure enough, just as I thought — he was in a row-boat — or maybe a canoe."

These facts had never been mentioned or even known in the Gulch and Bobby continued to stare like an idiot. "It's good you didn't live a couple of hundred years ago," he said; "you'd have been hung for witchcraft. How in the —"

"Never mind that — turn that meat over. Are you going after that cache or not? You can be Lewis or Clarke, whichever you like."



"Which of them was cleverer?"

"Well, that's hard saying; I kind of think Clarke."

"I'll be Lewis," said Bobby.

The next morning "Lewis" and "Clarke" started to follow Marias River down to its confluence with the great Missouri. They picked their way gingerly along the dizzy, precipitous banks where Captain Lewis had actually led his little exploring party in hope of determining whether this was in fact the true Missouri.

"By rights, you ought to tumble off a ledge somewhere along here," said Harry; "and if my guide, philosopher and friend, G. Lord, was here he'd make you do it. He believes in following facts."

"I'd like to see that kid," said Bobby.

They made their way through a rough, treeless country and at last, looking back, the only vestige of the work of man which they could see was a white speck which they knew to be the dam. No houses were there, nothing but the vast, endless country with the river flowing and tumbling and roaring and breaking into spray over the rocks in its deep rugged channel. Here, at least, it could not have changed much since the days of the intrepid Lewis and Clarke, and it was not hard for the boys to fancy themselves the original explorers.



Bobby had been to the Forks many times, but never along this historic route; and now the pair became as intimate and friendly as Lewis and Clarke themselves, which is saying a good deal.

After a walk of two hours or more they came to the historic spot where the two rivers united and where the famous exploring expedition had paused to camp.

As they stood there in a grove of trees which grew upon the neck of land formed by the junction of the two streams, Harry, who had read those fascinating volumes through, let his fancy wander back to that bygone time, and to the adventurous band which had made its way over that vast, unknown land, through strange and hostile tribes, following the windings of that mighty river whose distant trickling source lay somewhere among those frowning mountains to the west. No echo from any shrieking locomotives had reverberated from those mountains then. No dam was there; no irrigated lands; no Montana even.

Lewis and Clarke, in their coonskin caps and buckskin suits, had paused here and tried to decide which stream would lead them through the mountains. Before them rose the forbidding Rockies with their unknown fastnesses, and beyond these somewhere the head-waters of the great Columbia which should guide them to the Pacific. Behind them stretched that river along which they had



journeyed for so long, from the little outpost village of St. Louis, more than a thousand miles away. They had come, as they wrote in their journal, "from the United States," and when they had seen the waters of the Pacific, they were going back to the United States! And they did go back to the United States. They did their errand for President Jefferson and crossed the continent; crossed desert, mountain and prairie; made friends with savages instead of conquering them; and returned home to tell Uncle Sam of the vast, strange territory which he had acquired, and to report not a single disaster.

"They were a bully pair, those two," said Harry. "I'd loan you the books only I sent them to that friend of mine. I thought the adventures would get him."

"That's all right," Bobby said.

"When you stop to think of it a minute," Harry commented, "it was about as big a thing as Columbus tackled."

Bobby sat down on a large stone and Harry on another close by; for a moment neither spoke.

"Do you notice, Bobby, that these four stones form a sort of oblong?" There were two other stones about eight feet from where they sat.

"Don't tell me the cache is underneath this stone," said Bobby. "Break it gently, for goodness' sake; am I sitting on it?"



"No," said Harry, "but if you drew a line to connect these four stones, you'd have a rectangle."

"Guess you're right," said Bobby, glancing at the stones.

"Dare say a boat was hauled up here, hey?"

Bobby stared, and then laughed.

"Let's see if we can find any punk along in here." Harry got down on his knees and carefully parting the grass as he crawled along, explored a line which would have run lengthwise through his fancied rectangle. At every few inches he triumphantly lifted some small piece of wood in the last stages of rot. Some were hardly an inch long, others several inches, and most of them crumbled to mere powder at the pressure of his fingers. "I believe," he said, "that they hauled that old keel-boat of theirs ashore here and ran her keel on to a plank to keep the dampness from the ground getting into it. That would show they expected to stay here some time, wouldn't it? And they did.— And they wedged these four rocks against her hull to block her up."

"You *are* the limit!" said Bobby.

"But what gets me," said Harry, "is that there isn't any of this rotten stuff in the middle."

"All rotted away," said Bobby, kneeling with increasing interest.

"But there ought to be *some* here. I found it all the way from the end to about — Jump-



ing bull-frogs!" he shouted. "The plot grows thicker!"

"What?" said Bobby, astonished.

For a minute Harry was too engrossed to answer. "Bobby, run your hand over the earth here, just as if you were feeling a bump on—"

"It is a bump — isn't it?" said Bobby.

They moved their hands gently over the grassy earth which lay midway of the four stones. There was certainly a hubble there, and it was symmetrical.

"I don't see any sunflowers around," suggested Bobby.

"Hang the sunflowers!" said Harry, his hand moving with increasing assurance over the spot. "The Smithsonian Institute will be throwing roses and violets at us! What do we want with sunflowers?"

Harry had brought his scout belt-ax with him and he began excitedly hacking away the earth around this hubbly spot.

"Wait a minute," said Bobby, and pressing his fingers into the earth he pulled up an irregular bit of sward about eight or ten inches square, grass and all, from which the fresh earth dripped and the grass roots were perceptible on its under side. "Looks like a sod, doesn't it?"

"Do you mean to say a sod could be here a hundred years and not take root? The grass, roots



and all, just peels up like skin off an orange. That's because the earth is damp on account of the river."

Bobby screwed up his mouth incredulously. "Looks like a made sod to me," he said, half apologetically.

But the particular character of that earthy slab was of no importance, with all sorts of imagined possibilities lying beneath it, and it was not long before a hole two or three feet deep had been excavated, and Harry paused, thrilled and excited, as the stroke of his ax caused a dull, metallic clang.

"Hit a rock?"

"You call that a rock?" shouted Harry, delightedly pressing away enough earth to display a few inches of zinc surface. "Bobby, as sure as we kneel here we've found the lost cache! Help me lift this box out."

What followed I must record briefly, for there are other matters, and it would be superfluous to set down the excited exclamations, the disjointed sounds of exultation which Harry uttered as he and the astonished Bobby unearthed a large zinc chest and with the leverage of the ax unceremoniously broke it open. As Bobby very pertinently observed, large zinc chests do not grow in the earth of their own accord, and as Harry very truly explained, sunflowers, though hardy and persistent,



do not grow up through zinc boxes. And when a zinc box is found buried in the earth beneath where a boat has evidently stood, and when the rotten remnants of a plank show that all this happened many years ago, and when the size and position of the stones show that it was a good-sized keel-boat — Why, what conclusion was there but one?

“But what puzzles me,” said Bobby, “is why they couldn’t find it on their way back?”

“Don’t let that worry you,” said Harry.

“But it’s a fact,” said Bobby, “and you said yourself facts —”

“Facts?” Harry shouted, banging the big box; “isn’t that fact enough for you? If that isn’t a fact I’d like to know what is?”

“And we just stumbled on it!” said Bobby.

“Talk about facts!” Harry exclaimed.

“Well, you know,” said Bobby, half in apology and half in self-defense; “you said little facts —”

“Well, here’s a big one — big enough to make the Smithsonian Institute sit up and take notice.”

The truth was that Bobby, encouraged to quick observation by his new friend, was not quite able to forget the readiness with which that sod of earth had come up; but he was completely squelched by Harry’s enthusiasm and elation, and he was glad enough to believe in their sensational discovery.

“If you can beat that with facts,” said Harry, “you’ll be a wonder!”



And sure enough, no one could deny that the big zinc case and its contents were visible, irrefutable facts.

I shall conclude the description of this amazing discovery with an accurate record of what they found inside the box.

One old Indian tomahawk.

Two well-worn pairs of beaded Indian moccasins.

Two complete buckskin outfits and fur caps.

Indian headgear with feathers.

A very old and dilapidated copy of Robinson Crusoe.

Two rusty rifles and one in better condition.

Several buffalo horns.

Bows and arrows and an old quiver.

An Indian tom-tom.

Canvas tent, much rotted, with many holes.

A tripod (old-fashioned surveyor's type, Bobby thought).

A rusty, cylindrical thing with a crank handle, which looked like a peanut-roaster.

Several pictures, evidently torn from an old book, of men in buckskin.

Two large cans of very fine powder, which Harry thought might be gunpowder.

A folded and ragged American flag.



A small can of seeds, but none of the familiar sunflower seeds which Harry knew.

A piece of canvas hose about three feet long.

The thing which interested the boys most was the rusty, cylindrical thing with the crank handle, which looked like a peanut-roaster.



## CHAPTER XX

### WESLEY FALLS INTO THE HANDS OF SCOUNDRELS

WHEN Wesley Binford found himself in the forest that night of his departure from the Gulch, he thought it would be easy to find his way to the nearest town.

So it might have been if he had gone by day, but as the darkness fell, the trail became less tangible, and Wesley did what the tenderfoot is almost certain to do; he verged from it along a fancied path and was soon lost; for it is a curious thing about a fancied path that you cannot follow it back to the real trail. It has no reality usually, and is formed of some dim light or vague shadow which becomes invisible directly one turns about.

Finally with a feeling of abject terror, he lay down to await the morning, his foot paining intensely.

In the morning he arose refreshed and cheerful. It seemed as if he and the woods had got acquainted, as if they understood each other at last and would have no further differences.

He started out intent on regaining the trail, but paused and listened doubtfully as the sound of dis-



tant voices reached his ear. He had supposed that these solemn dim aisles were never frequented, but now he saw a distant figure, speaking to some one else who was not visible. The speaker was very disreputable in appearance and as Wesley looked from behind a tree, his desire to approach unceremoniously diminished perceptibly, and he decided to look before he leaped.

The figure was evidently that of a young man. He wore a dirty white sweater, a little peaked cap, and there was an aspect of toughness about him. Then another similarly disreputable figure emerged and the two appeared to speak together, glancing furtively off at intervals as if to assure themselves that no one was near. One of them adjusted his hand above his eyes in quite the dramatic fashion of a true villain and appeared to scrutinize the immediate vicinity where Wesley stood concealed. It seemed to him incredible that under such careful scrutiny he was not discovered; but the pair appeared to be reassured and then one reached in his pocket and handed the other something, part of which dropped to the ground. One stooped, with a very guilty, hasty air, to pick up the fallen articles, while the other scanned the neighborhood apprehensively, hand above his eyes.

It was perfectly evident to Wesley that whatever was afoot was of a villainous nature. Presently one of the two appeared to be expostulating with



the other who extended his open palm and turned his head away as if beseeching him to desist. Then, suddenly, a third figure appeared upon the scene. He wore regular civilian clothes and carried a coat over his arm. He stepped back, apparently in surprise, at their argument, then came briskly forward, producing from his pocket a roll of currency almost as large in circumference as a tomato can, which staggered poor Wesley. He wetted his finger and proceeded to peel from this generous roll a dozen or two bills, which he liberally offered to the young man in the white sweater. This magnanimous offer seemed to reassure the young man, and he hesitated, then thrust his open hand toward the new-comer as if to renounce temptation. Wesley hoped that this good resolution at the last minute would prove unassailable, but the new-comer, who was evidently the chief scoundrel and fabulously rich, again produced his gigantic roll and with startling prodigality peeled off about twenty or thirty more bills and tendered them to his weakening accomplice.

This was too much for the accomplice. He put his hand to his head, looked upon the ground with an expression of agony, as if trying still to beat down temptation. Again the tempter peeled off a dozen or two more bills from his inexhaustible roll, and this was a knock-out blow to the poor accomplice's tottering resolution. He scanned the



neighborhood, hand above his eyes, then wheeled about and accepted the money. It was a sad illustration of the evil power of money over a weak nature. Wesley felt that the man with the roll was an unmitigated scoundrel.

Now all three crept stealthily away and Wesley cautiously advanced to the spot where they had stood. The treasure which one had dropped and picked up with such apparent fear and care, seemed hardly worth the trouble of stooping, nor had it been picked up carefully either, for there, still scattered upon the ground, were a number of wooden toothpicks.

He could still see the mysterious strangers and presently a little light was thrown upon their lawless enterprise, as one stooped and gathered some dried leaves about a good-sized tree. He then handed what seemed to be more toothpicks to the other young fellow, who disappeared. Wesley thought now that the toothpicks had been spilled in a pocket exploration for matches. The chief scoundrel stood calmly by, his head cocked sideways, his hands in his pockets, while his young companion stooped and appeared to strike a match and then thrust it among the dried leaves. It seemed to Wesley that if the leaves were not sufficient to start a good blaze the magnanimous villain might throw on two or three hundred bills to help things along.



Before there was any sign of blaze both departed in the direction the third fellow had taken and presently from that locality there rose a dense smoke among the trees.

Wesley had now no doubts as to what all this meant. They were setting fire to the National Forest. He had heard talk in the Gulch of rich mill-owners doing such things in retaliation for fancied grievances or to get timber cheaply, and he had no doubt that the man with the roll was a rich mill owner.

The boy's fear and surprise now vanished and he had but one thought—to prevent this act of incredible villainy. Limping forward, he was about to stamp out the incipient blaze, when he noticed that the leaves had not caught fire. There were several toothpicks lying about. Assuring himself that there was no danger here, he hurried toward the spot where the dense smoke was rising, but stopped short in astonishment at the sight which he beheld.

There was the chief villain, the rich mill-owner, sitting on a little camp stool, patiently turning the crank of an instrument which stood on another camp stool. It consisted of a good-sized cylinder which lay horizontally and slowly revolved as the man turned the crank. At the other end a hose seemed to enter just where the axle must have been, so that the revolutions did not interfere with the



hose, and at the other end of the hose the young man in the white sweater, with cheeks bulging, was blowing lustily. As the cylinder revolved, only its upper surface was exposed and from this arose veritable clouds of smoke which spread in the air above; but no vestige of a blaze could be seen anywhere.

"How d'do," said the chief scoundrel, in a comfortable, familiar way, as if there were nothing at all surprising or unusual about Wesley's appearance there. "Nice day."

"Y-yes," stammered Wesley.

Then he noticed a few yards distant the other young fellow standing behind a large polished oak box on a tripod, also turning a crank.

"You're up early," said the chief scoundrel, turning all the while.

"I — I'm lost," said Wesley.

"No!" said the man, amusedly.

"Guess I ought to know," said Wesley. "If a fellow can't find his way, he's lost, isn't he?"

The man appeared to consider this argument, cocking his head ruminatively on one side, as he turned the crank. "Don't know but what you're right," said he, presently. "How 'bout that, Andy?"

Andy removed the hose from his bulging cheeks to say that it seemed so to him.

The man's apparent disposition to be serious and



reasonable over such an idiotic and trifling statement annoyed Wesley. Also he was surprised at the total lack of any astonishment on the stranger's part at his unexpected appearance.

In a few minutes the three ceased operations.

"Ever see a forest fire before?" asked the man, rising.

"Not this kind," said Wesley.

"No? Well, you'll see it on the films next year."

"Is it motion-pictures, you're making? I've been watching you for half an hour."

"Yes? George, we were caught red-handed after all," he added, to the young man who was folding the tripod. "I'll have to get you a field-glass to watch out with."

Wesley had a feeling that he was being pleasantly jollied, but the easy and complacent familiarity with which the stranger had greeted him in this wild, out-of-the-way place, attracted him. They might have known each other for years, and this might have been a thronging thoroughfare for all evidence the man showed to the contrary. There was something about him which made Wesley feel perfectly at home and he had not been there five minutes before he was talking freely. The man was somewhat older than his two assistants who seemed not much older than Wesley himself, and there was an atmosphere of comradeship among



them which the lost and friendless wanderer noticed wistfully.

The "chief scoundrel" was slightly under the medium height and had a way of thrusting his hands into his pockets, cocking his head sideways and listening attentively; and Wesley was puzzled and a trifle uncomfortable at this for he was a sensitive boy and he could not be sure whether the man was interested in what he said or was just making fun of him by listening with exaggerated seriousness. The strange apparatus which had diffused that cloud of counterfeit smoke also interested Wesley.

He had been to motion-picture shows enough, but the thought of how these counterfeit disasters were devised had never occurred to him, except once and that was on that thoughtful Sunday night which he had spent on Captain Bocker's hospitable tug. Then he had wondered how a person could fall from a cliff a hundred feet high and not lose his life. He was not familiar with Gordon Lord's laconic phrase of, "There's a way," and I think it is a good illustration of the difference between Wesley and Harry Arnold that Wesley had frequented the "movies" without the least curiosity about the interesting and adventurous work of making the films, while Harry, who never bothered with the "movies" and would have been bored at merely sitting in an audience, had always been lured by



the adventurous end of the work, the hazardous and out-door part.

"Is that your name?" Wesley asked, pointing to a large black leather case, equipped with a shoulder-strap. On it was printed in white letters the name CARLETON CONNE, CHICAGO, U. S. A.

"My very own," the man confessed with mock coyness.

"I think I read an article about you in a magazine, didn't I?"

"I'm sure I don't know."

"With pictures of how you starved to death on Mont Blanc in Switzerland?"

"That was the night we had the Swiss stew."

"The night you starved to death?" laughed Wesley.

"We starved to death before we had the stew," the man explained. "Andy, here, gives away photos to magazines; we can't stop him—it's a habit.—So you're in the Lost and Found column, hey? George, why wouldn't that be a good idea? 'Lost in the Forest'?"

"Not enough action," said George.

"Might put in a grizzly or two."

"That ought to help the action," ventured Wesley.

"Might work it right in with the forest fires, eh?" Mr. Conne suggested, in a complacent, businesslike way. "I'd have given a Canadian dime



to have met him over in Death Valley, when we were paying two and a half an hour to real cowboys."

"I said from the first," observed George, "that a fifty-cent made-up cowboy would be cheaper, traveling expenses and all included."

"I know, George, but it's awful hard to get the swagger — that's worth a dollar seventy-five."

"Not much action in that sheep-ranch business, either, if you come to that," argued Mr. Conne.

"I know," said Andy, "but we've got the sheep-shearer's murder to help us out there."

"I'm half a mind to cut out all that sheep and cattle business anyway," said Mr. Conne, "and use the airship murder down at the South Pole — just as Shackleton suggested.— Where'd you stray from?" he asked, turning suddenly to Wesley.

For a moment the boy did not answer. This delightful "shop talk" fascinated him, and he could hardly believe his eyes when he realized that here in this lonely forest he had actually stumbled upon the famous Carleton Conne who had "arranged" the Zulu war in South Africa, and risked his life to "film up" Siberia and "get" the savage cannibal tribes along the unknown Amazon. Here he was, face to face with that adventurous, elusive creature who (according to the *Illustrated Metropolis Magazine*) was actually going to accompany the next Antarctic Expedition; who knew



Shackleton and Peary, and whose camera tripod had sunken into the venomous marshes of the Everglades, in the interest of the great, thriving business which he represented. And could these be Andy Breen and George Warren, whose pictures in Eskimo attire the *Metropolis* had published?

"I was working for the government," he said, when he found his voice, "in Long Gulch — the water conservation business; it's over —"

"Yes, we were nosing around down there a month or so ago," said Mr. Conne. "In fact, we've got some truck stored down that way. We expect to blow that dam up next spring if all goes well, and I can get a permit from the government. I was in Washington about it a while ago. I'm trying to arrange for a good, big loss of life."

"I suppose the blowing up will be something like the smoke of these forest fires," laughed Wesley, "and the toothpick matches."

"Something like that," said Mr. Conne, in a matter-of-fact way.

"Along the line of ocular delusion," said Andy Breen; "use the smoke for a drop-curtain, you know."

Wesley didn't know, but he was very much interested.

"Tell us about it," said Mr. Conne.

"Oh, there isn't much to tell," said Wesley, sitting down on a camp stool. Mr. Conne thrust his



hands far down into his trousers pockets, standing before Wesley and rocking his form backward and forward on his heels and toes, listening in a whimsical though friendly way. He was easy to talk to.

"I had charge of some work there, but I wasn't Civil Service, and then Uncle Sam sent word that some one was coming — a Civil Service fellow — to take my place — and I wouldn't have liked being thrown down — but more than that I wouldn't have liked being kept either — because that fellow is entitled to the job — see?"

Mr. Conne, rocking back and forth all the while, cocked his head on one side, contemplating Wesley frankly as if to determine whether he was insane. Then he cocked his head on the other side and contemplated him with equal frankness as if to determine whether he was sincere. "Huh," said he, "what'd you want to do that for?"

"Maybe it *was* a fool thing to do," said Wesley, "but I couldn't help it. The job belonged to the other fellow, and I knew him — knew who he was, and —"

"What are you going to do now?"

"I'm going to try to get out of here and find work somewhere."

"Where?"

"Well, I don't know, but I might —"

"The nearest railroad station is eighteen miles."

Wesley was silent.



"What's your name?"

Wesley told him.

"Used to outdoor life?"

"Lately — yes."

"Hmmm."

"I — I'd be glad to do anything."

"How much the old gent give you?"

"Twenty-five dollars a month."

"Getting extravagant in his old age."

There was a pause during which Mr. Conne rocked back and forth, his head sideways, and an unlighted cigar sticking almost upright from the extreme corner of his mouth. He made no concealment of the fact that he was sizing Wesley up. He looked at him as if he might be some inanimate thing which he contemplated buying.

"Well," he finally said, "suppose you take a jump with us, eh? You're a good husky youngster and not bad-looking. Anybody ever tell you that?"

"No — sir."

"We've been doing the Lewis and Clarke Expedition from Dakota out as far as the Forks, and I've been paying union wages to Indians and outlaws and cowboys till I've only got about a dollar and a half to take us from here to Honolulu. We're going into Helena now to get a button sewed on, and then we'll take a hop, skip and jump over the Rockies and finish up our last L. and C. reel



with the party reaching the Pacific; you can be Lewis—the Lewis I used as far as the Forks wanted more money and I fired him.—Then at Seattle we have a date to go off on a wrecking steamer, maybe as far as Hawaii, and back to your Gulch here in the spring. From there we'll probably hop into Mexico if What's-his-name down there keeps on being naughty, and work the Huerta business in with some old Aztec stuff that's simmering in my head. Suppose—suppose," he added with a comfortable and comforting air of friendliness, "suppose I say we'll give you twenty dollars a week, not counting ham sandwiches and things."

Wesley had thought he was going to say "a month" and he had intended to accept the proposition instantly, but when Mr. Conne said "a week" he simply stared. He felt that the motion-picture business would go into bankruptcy with such prodigal recklessness.

*And not counting ham sandwiches and things!*

He would receive that fabulous sum for the delightful privilege of accompanying the trio in their fascinating adventures!

And such a programme!

He would have no call upon his princely income. By next spring he would have over five hundred dollars!

"Is it a go?" asked Mr. Conne, pleasantly.

"Do I look like a fool?" said Wesley.



## CHAPTER XXI

### TWO LETTERS

THE adventures which filled those months Wesley spent with his new friends are not a part of this story. Yet they form a story, if ever a series of adventures did.

The extraordinary episode with its miraculous consequences in which the party was concerned at the remote cable station on Midway Island, and their discovery of the scuttled schooner, *Sally Y*, not only formed exceptional material for the films, but constituted a chain of phenomenal happenings which had not been anticipated, and which brought Mr. Conne as near to death as he had ever been in his reckless and adventurous career.

The time they spent on the wrecking steamer and the affair of the Sasimo divers would alone form a very tolerable story (as stories go in these days), but it is my hope to crowd all these matters into a single narrative, if I can ever get hold of Wesley to enlighten me a little further as to whether the diver is actually the same as the one to be seen in the famous "movie" play of "The Pearl Robbers," which is one of the results of that strange cruise.



But Wesley is so absorbed in his engineering work these days that he only laughs and says, "Forget it," when asked about that remarkable passage in his life.

You may well suppose that the incredible discovery of the lost cache furnished a sensation to Long Gulch, and Harry regretted that he had sent the Lewis and Clarke books to Gordon and so was unable to check off the contents of the box with the articles enumerated in the published *Journal*. If he had only known it, there was no use in sending them anyway for Gordon was so much engrossed with certain epoch-making matters that he never even looked at them.

If there was a sensation for the Gulch, there was also a smaller but gratifying sensation for the boys when word came from Bismarck, North Dakota, of the arrest of a pickpocket there, who had in his possession several unused Government envelopes with "Reclamation Service" printed on them and a railroad mileage book, containing the name of E. C. Bronson, Long Gulch, Montana. Mr. Bronson, who had in fact missed his mileage book, had not the time to go to Bismarck and identify the fellow, and if he was convicted at all (which seems likely) it must have been for his pickpocket operations. So Bobby never received his money from the thief, but he made no complaint of that. He



reimbursed Harry and was satisfied. Bobby was a good loser — when it wasn't a case of losing a friend.

Best of all, Harry's deductions were sufficiently confirmed and Wesley was cleared beyond all shadow of doubt, if indeed he needed any more clearing. Harry had told Bobby of his previous acquaintance with Wesley, although he had said nothing about the incident of the canoe, and they talked a good deal about employing their deductive faculties (particularly Harry's) to locate Wesley and bring him back to his beloved East Hill.

Thus the summer matured until the shorter days and cooler evenings heralded the fall.

One day Harry received two letters. One, as nearly as he could make out from the blurred postmark, was from Honolulu. The envelope contained a two-dollar bill, a one-dollar bill, and a five-cent stamp. Not a word of writing was there; but the amount of three dollars and five cents was fixed in his mind and he knew from whom the money came and what it was for.

Wesley Binford and Harry Arnold were square!

The second envelope which he opened also contained money — eleven cents. On an accompanying card were printed the words, "Dividends of the Busy Beavers Amalgamated, Consolidated Westward-Ho Syndicate." So Harry's investment, though a mystery to him, was paying a dividend!



"I'd give a cruller to know what that is," he chuckled, opening the third envelope. Its enclosure caused his chuckle to develop into a smile of frank pleasure, for it took him back to those two delightful years he had spent in Panama.

DEAR HARRY: —

I got your letter telling me about your going to Montana, and I'm sending this letter hoping it will reach you there. I was stationed with the Reclamation Service on the Colorado last winter and they're all right and I'm glad you're with them. In the Army we call them the wonder-workers and they deserve the name, all right.

Well, Harry, I'm a long time answering that letter of yours and it seems as if we'd never get around to meeting again. Remember how down in Pan we were always planning for you to come out to Whitville and go fishing on the Mississippi? Well, Harry, I think I see a way to fix that now if you can take care of your end of it, and if I ever get you at my old Missouri home, believe me, Harry, I'll duck that old head of yours in the river and hang you up on the levee to dry. So you know what you're up against.

Well, I'm stationed here at El Paso, Texas, and we've got our other eye squinted across the chalk-line, you can bet. I'm in barracks that would make the Panama barracks look like an Alabama



coon's chicken-coop. Harry, these greasy Mexicans can't look you straight in the eye. They can't even play quoits on the square. I've tried them. There's going to be noise enough down this way inside of a year or two to wake the baby. We can see it coming. Well, if I don't happen to be in the wrong end of the shooting-gallery between now and next spring, I'll have my leave at that time — and it's back to home and mother for little Jackie.

Now, Harry, here comes the scheme, so look out. Why couldn't you get your leave at the same time? Now, don't say you don't want any leave — I've heard that before. The trouble with you is your conscience makes you top-heavy.

You brace Uncle Samuel for your leave next April — see? Chalk that up on the wall so you won't forget it. And remember my address, Whitville, Mo., where the gentle Mississippi rolls. If you go east without coming down to Whitville while I'm there, I'll know it's because you're getting so chesty that you've no use for your old Panama friends. Remember — next April.

Your old soldier friend,

HON. JACK HOLDEN.

P. S.—How's that parrot of yours?

It was like a whiff of that far-off, tropical breeze which Harry had known away down there on the Isthmus to read this letter from the soldier boy



whom he had known so intimately in the Zone. It was the same, slangy, bantering, devil-may-care Jack Holden. It was little thought Jack took of his life. Whatever may have been his faults he had the splendid recklessness of the true soldier. So he had been playing quoits with the "greasy Mexicans" across the border! How very much like Jack that was! And if he was not at the wrong end of the shooting gallery (how lightly he spoke of that gruesome contingency) he would go home to his mother and sisters in the spring.

Harry folded the letter, smiling thoughtfully, for through his pleasure at receiving it and all the pleasant memories which it recalled, there seemed to stalk a specter, called into being by that careless, characteristic phrase, "if I don't happen to be at the wrong end of the shooting gallery."

What did it mean, in plain English? That if he had not been shot he would have his leave and go home!

The little sentence haunted him all that night; he saw Jack Holden, Jack, so slangy and reckless and affectionate; Jack, who stood so straight and walked with that careless swagger — shot down.

It brought that horror of war very close.



## CHAPTER XXII

### THE CYCLONE

“WAIT a minute till I lock the safe.”

Bobby and Harry were going to the last “Minstrels,” for the long winter with its concrete-embankment work, was drawing to a close; the ice which had once been devastating wild water was melting; they had skated on it for the last time, and Uncle Sam’s community of Long Gulch was breaking up.

It had been a city of a day. Soon the spring freshets would begin to pour into the great rugged valley which had been prepared for their reception and imprisonment, and on the site of this transitory cabin town would rise the government’s vast storage lake, a stupendous federal prison whose convict body should be made useful to irrigate the land and contribute its power, in times of need, to the purposes of navigation.

“It was a good job,” as Mr. Barney had said, and now the people of that busy camp would go their several ways in little squads, east and south and west, to work upon the rivers; and at last Harry was going to see the “Old Lady.”



Bobby snapped an enormous padlock upon that once-rifled drawer and they started forth. He was not so regretful to leave the Gulch as Harry, for he had been jumping about the country too long to allow himself to acquire an attachment to any one place.

"It was the same in Phoenix, Arizona,"<sup>1</sup> he said, "when we cleared out. There was weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth; but you see we all meet again sometime or other. These big jobs are like family reunions."

Harry glanced at Bobby as that blasé and much-traveled young man walked gayly at his side, and thought how this was Bobby's whole life; to go wherever he was sent, following the erratic trail of that versatile and much-sought captain, his transit over his shoulder, cooking his own meals, on snow-capped mountains, in pestilent lowlands, in rugged valleys; always ready to leave at a minute's notice, full of official gossip, cheerful, generous, original.

"After that little pick-pocket episode," he observed, "you can't be too careful. As I came in to-night there was a queer-looking duffer sizing up the dam. I told the captain we ought to have it chained down. I keep my other eye on strangers these days, you can bet."

"I saw the captain to-day, too," said Harry.

<sup>1</sup> Where the great Roosevelt dam was erected for the impounding of wild water, one of the boldest engineering feats the government has ever undertaken.



"He says when we hit St. Louis I can take a jump into Washington (at the risk of being kept there for the rest of my life), and turn over all this Lewis and Clarke stuff to the Smithsonian Institute. Gee, won't the papers be full of it? Maybe it's leaked out and that fellow you saw to-night is a reporter, hey?"

"Do you know what they'll do," said Bobby, "when you spring that on them? They'll steer you right into the Secret Service."

"Not if I see them first — I'm Reclamation, now and forever!"

"What else the captain say?"

"Said when we get down as far as the Ohio I can have my leave, but he'd like me to do some inspection farther down the Mississippi."

"And you refused?" said Bobby.

"I did — *not!* That'll give me a chance to visit that friend of mine in Missouri that I told you about."

There followed a pause.

"Do you know, Bobby, I was just thinking — They were talking in Headquarters — Mr. Barney and Bronson — about some trouble with the water-works people in Great Falls."

"That's an old story," said Bobby. "Wherever we start to do anything there are always private interests, screeching and hollering, 'No fair!' We stretch a tape line across a river and it's 'obstructing



navigation.' I'd like to know who's making navigation possible if it isn't Mr. U. Samuel, Washington, D.C. They make me sick!"

"But this is what I was thinking of, Bob; the night I started from Washington, when I was half asleep in my berth I heard somebody say something about blowing up a dam with dynamite."

"What?" said Bobby, stopping short.

"Of course, I may have been more than half asleep. I thought some one said something about a cache, too, but I guess I dreamed it, because I'd been talking that evening about the lost cache. Maybe I dreamed the dynamite business, too; but a stitch in time saves nine — doesn't it?"

"If the dam should be blown up," said Bobby, "the captain would be just too provoked for anything."

"Well, you can laugh, but you don't know who this stranger was, do you? He may have come from Great Falls. There couldn't possibly be any harm in watching him, could there? I say let's cut out the Minstrels and hike down outside the dam and keep our eyes peeled."

Bobby hesitated. "I don't believe anybody would go as far as that," he said. "The water-works people don't fight that way; they get men elected to Congress and send men there to hang out in the lobby. That's *their* way."

"Well," retorted Harry, "mightn't it have been



one of those same men who said that in the station at Washington?"

Bobby halted again and looked at him uncertainly.

"I was right about the cache, wasn't I?" Harry urged.

"Yes, you were," said Bobby, decidedly. "Let's go down outside the dam."

It was a good tramp to the "funnel," as they called the narrow end of the Gulch, and it was dark when they passed by the turbines.

As was often the case, their conversation turned on Wesley. He was now a mere memory in the Gulch, yet there clustered about his name one or two traditions which kept the memory green and his sudden coming and going, his triumph on East Hill, though but an unknown, ill-paid local helper, his looping of the great rock, his youth, his limp and the nickname which had wholly eclipsed his own name; all this helped to make his brief career a sort of legend. Those who came after him heard of the lame Query who had come with the captain, no one knew whence (for the captain's lips were sealed as to that); who had had an inspiration, carried it out, risked his life, and disappeared, no one knew where. The fact that he had gone just as his work was completed gave a touch of romance to his short career in the Gulch. Those who found satisfaction in slurring schools and colleges (and



there are always such) would tell how this untrained boy had come and gone and what he had done, and repeat that colleges do not make brains after all.

There were two ways of going out of this end of the Gulch. One was through the spillway, past the turbines, but that way was closed now. It took you out into the deep gully in which the river flowed, and then you had to clamber up the precipitous banks. For the river formed, as one might say, the tube of the funnel. The other way out was from Headquarters, level with the summit of the dam, and then you found yourself on top of the rocky precipice with the river flowing in its confined channel far below you. It was dusk when the boys stood here.

"What makes it so dark?" said Harry. "We ought to have light for an hour yet."

"This isn't twilight," Bobby answered, sniffing the air; "it's storm darkness. Look down at the river — it looks like blue steel."

It did look like blue steel, and all the material of that rugged gully seemed of the same cold shade, as if one were looking through smoked glass. There was none of the softness of twilight.

"Guess we're going to have a storm," repeated Bobby. "Look at that tree."

A tree across the river had all its leaves turned up showing their light-colored under sides as if a



breeze were blowing upward from the ground. Yet they felt no stir of air. There was something unusual and vaguely portentous which they felt rather than saw. But what startled them was a boat moored to the rocky bank far below them. It was of the same color as all else — a dull blue.

“That doesn’t belong here,” said Bobby.

“Yes, it does; see, it’s got ‘U.S.’ on it. It looks different on account of this queer darkness.”

“Guess you’re right,” said Bobby.

As they looked down at the boat two figures appeared from beyond the Headquarters building. They clambered like monkeys down into the ravine, looking somber enough above, but directly they were in that magic valley they were of the same hue as all else — the same dull blue. They unfastened the boat and started down stream in it, looking like specters far down in that fantastic gloom.

“What do you know about that?” said Bobby.

“I know I’m going to find out,” Harry answered. He went around the corner of Headquarters, but found the door locked. Conway had evidently closed the place but a few minutes before, for he was walking along perhaps fifty yards away. Harry called to him, “Those fellows belong here?”

“What?” said Conway, turning, his face looking yellow in the vivid, strange half-darkness.

“Those fellows belong here?”



Conway shook his head and Harry turned back to Bobby. "Conway gets on my nerves," he said. "You couldn't ruffle him with an earthquake. He'd just make a memorandum of it and put it on the captain's desk. Shall we follow that pair?"

It seemed the part of wisdom to do so. The visit of these strangers appeared suspicious enough to warrant trailing them to ascertain whence they had come, for though there were small communities near the Forks, no visitors save an occasional excursion party from Fort Benton ever troubled the big camp. To the little settlements which straggled along the railroad it had long since ceased to be a novelty, and the time of day and the surreptitious departure lent color to the boys' suspicions that these strangers were on some sinister errand.

The current, reinforced by the rising wind, carried the little craft rapidly along, but the boys, who knew the country well, could save all the bends and so they were enabled, from time to time, to be waiting for it, effectually concealed amid the rocks and brush at the brink of the ravine.

The wind was rising rapidly now and it seemed to catch up and disseminate all the pungent odors of nature.

Down in the gloom of that drear cañon the single rower tried to stem the speed at which he was being driven, while his companion strove futilely



to keep the little craft head on. The boat had reached a part of the river where the rocky walls rose almost sheer on either side, with scarcely an inch of shore between it and those precipitous heights.

"Look!" said Harry, pointing off across the country.

"I see," said Bobby; "a tent."

"Yes, but not that; look beyond!"

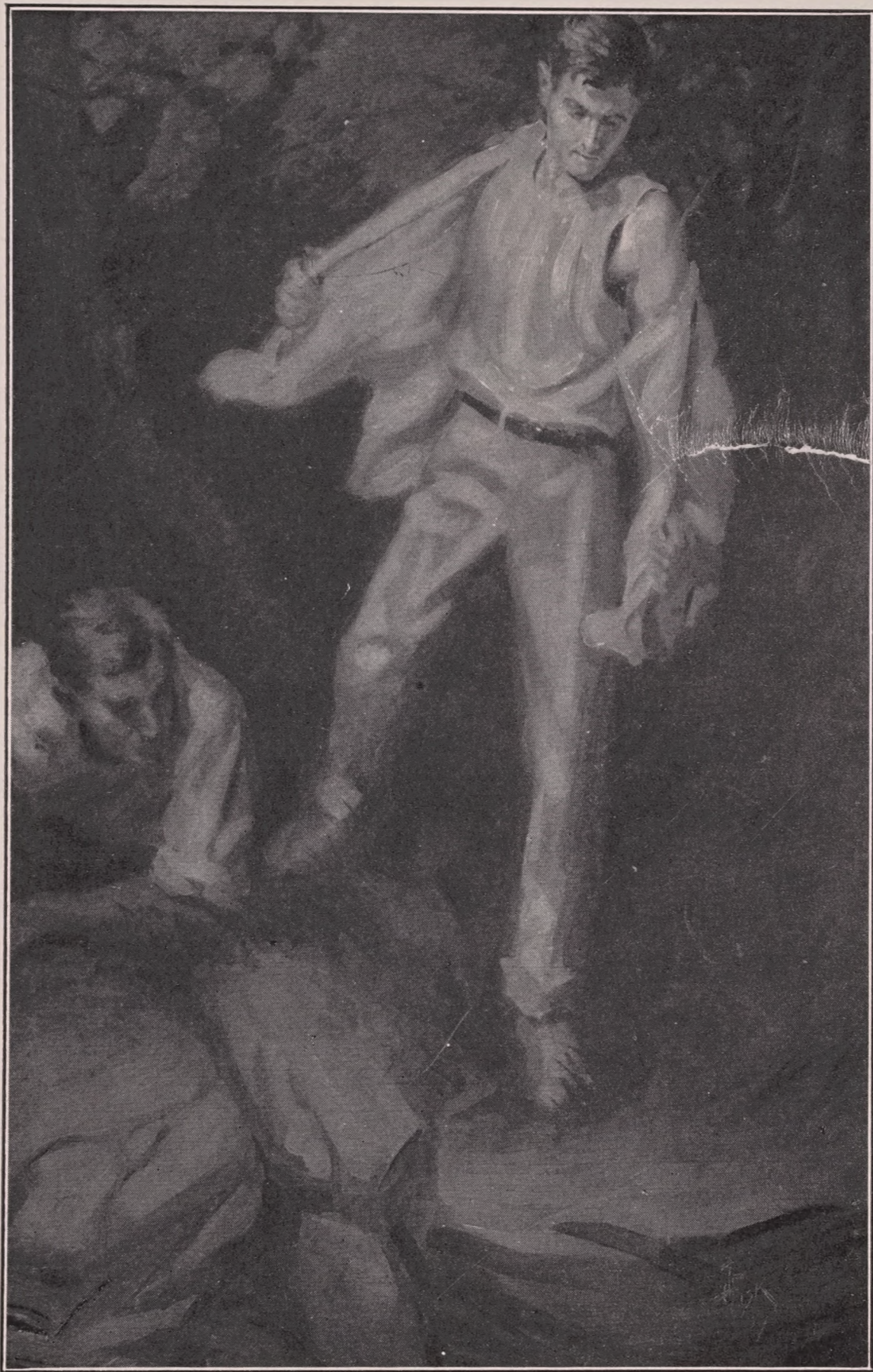
A great, gray, spreading column arose a mile or two away, like a silhouette of a gigantic palm tree, and it seemed to move toward them tipsily, as if its spreading top were too heavy for it. In the middle distance was a tent which shone white and vivid in the transparent gloom.

"It's a cyclone," said Bobby.

The wind was creating havoc all about them. It came in spasmodic gusts, uprooting small trees, and the upper parts of larger trees were compressed to half their circumference as if they were being pulled through some great invisible tube. Harry's cap flew off and went whirling upward. Then suddenly, a sort of gray darkness fell upon them, a suffocating smell of dust, and the sound of crashing stone and crackling of great branches. Instinctively, Harry embraced the trunk of a large tree.

"Lie down!" Bobby shrieked and they both fell flat. They were in the midst of a whirling





"AGAIN A PIERCING CRY CAME FROM BELOW. REGARDLESS OF BOBBY'S FRANTIC WARNING, HARRY ROSE TO HIS FULL HEIGHT."







pandemonium. Harry dimly heard Bobby say that it was not so much of a one and to "let the top spin over him."

"How about the boat?" he called, apprehensively.

They crawled along to the brink of the ravine and looked over. The little boat was directly below them, whirling around as if it were on a pivot. No figure was to be seen, but amid the sound of crashing above and roaring below, there arose a cry which made the boys shudder.

"Do you see either of them?" Harry asked.

"No," said Bobby; "they're gone, all right. Lie down!" he shrieked as Harry rose. "Can't you do what I tell you — once! It'll be worse in a minute! I've been through this before. Lie down!"

Again a piercing cry came from below. Regardless of Bobby's frantic warning, Harry rose to his full height. He must have removed his shoes without Bobby's knowing it. What happened was all in an instant and Bobby did not realize it until he was conscious of being alone, and of Harry's shoes and shirt lying near him. Then he knew his companion had dived. The despairing cry of the dying is irresistible to some, and Harry was one of these. He had not the slightest reason to suppose that his brains would not be crashed out in that howling chasm, nor any plan or idea, however



insane, for getting out of it. There was the cry and he dived — that was all.

“What’s the matter?” said a voice. “The wind take him over?”

Bobby turned and saw two figures, wind-swept and wild-looking, crawling and edging toward him. He did not answer, only breathed heavily; nor did he look closely at the strangers; everything seemed a dream. His senses were numbed with horror.

The depth of the river where Harry made his mad plunge might for all he knew have been but a foot or two, but it happened to be nearer fifty, and he rose to the surface with a sense of giddiness, but with a whole skull. If there were any satisfaction in being alive and uninjured, in this seething, roaring cañon, with drowning as the inevitable alternative, that dubious triumph was his. He was hardly better off than he would have been in the bottom of a well; and his dizziness and the tumult all about him left him dazed.

He saw an end of the almost submerged boat bobbing near him and a figure clinging to it. What he might have done it is hard to say, if his glimpse of the sunken boat had not given him an inspiration.

Running his hand over the bow, he encountered a metal ring with a rope attached to it. The weight of his body as he clung to the boat submerged it still more and the other figure disappeared.



"Can you swim?" Harry spluttered. "Keep up a minute more, if you can."

"All right," a voice answered.

Then other voices came from above, thin and spent, as if miles away, and yet strangely clear amid the uproar.

"Any one alive down there?"

Following the rope with his hand, he found that it was coiled up under the forward seat and at its end, as he had hoped, was a small folding anchor.

The whole locality, above and below, was in the clutch of the whirling tempest. Great branches, rent from trees above, were borne into the ravine, spun in mid-air and carried away again, or crashing against the precipitous rocks fell into the turbulent current. One descended almost upon the struggling figures, then shot upward, disappearing in the darkness. It seemed like some great, flying reptile. Above, the sound of rending and crashing and of the furious wind made the voices there to seem like voices heard in a dream. Yet there were voices.

"A second more," Harry panted. "Can you keep up?"

"Guess — so," came the answer.

Then he shouted to those above, but no one answered. Grasping the rope about two feet from the anchor, he clambered up on the logy boat. It was a doubtful enough foot-hold, but for one short



moment before it rolled, it braced him somewhat against the yielding water.

Swinging the anchor like a sling-shot, he let it fly and fell backward in the water from the force of his throw. There was, of course, danger of its descending on his own or his companion's head, but luckily it did not, and after three vain attempts he found that the anchor had caught somewhere and when he pulled the rope it was tight. He tried his weight upon it and it gave a trifle, then held fast.

Again he shouted to those above and this time he thought he heard a faint reply. Then a slight jerking of the rope showed that its other end was in human hands.

"Here," Harry panted. "Alive yet? Grab this."

"There's another," came the gasping answer, "if he hasn't — gone down."

"I know it," said Harry. "Can you climb that?"

He did not wait to see, but dived in search of the other occupant of the little boat. Coming up, he grasped the end of the craft for a moment's breath before diving again, when he became aware of heavy, irregular gulping close to him. Suddenly, amid the whirl and uproar, he caught a glimpse of the struggling figure half way up the rope. He seemed to be in a circle of dazzling



light. Harry had never seen such lightning before; but then, he had never seen such a storm before. The ascending form seemed to have another rope now, which was looped around under one arm.

"Can you make it?" a thin voice called. There was no answer, but the figure climbed slowly, encompassed by that uncanny glare.

Then a strange thing happened. The glare moved slowly down upon Harry, seeking him out like a great peering eye, and approaching him with tipsy, erratic jerks, like the capricious movement of magnified sun-rays when thrown about a room by a small lens.

Then it fairly embraced him, and the little world where he was became vivid. There was the galvanized ring, fastened to the bow of the boat, shining brightly, and clicking with the vibration of the tightened rope, which disappeared at the circumference of the circle of light. Outside of this little world, all was darkness, but within it all was vivid and dazzling; and there in the water-logged boat, half in and half out of it, lay a limp body.

Harry placed one arm around it, and grasping the rope, held the head above water, placing no more extra weight upon the rope than was necessary.

Then the encompassing light moved away and he was alone in the darkness holding the dead or unconscious body in one arm and grasping the rope with the other.



A tightening and quick loosening of the rope told him that the ascending figure was over the embankment. Groping in the dark, he unfastened the rope from the boat and tied it around his own body, under the arms. Just then the limp form began to cough and splutter.

"You all right?" Harry asked.

For a minute there was no answer; then a weak, "Guess so."

If the person whom he held was indeed alive, and so it seemed, he must have managed to keep his head out of water until just before the moment Harry had discovered him, unconscious in the submerged boat.

Again a voice came from above and in the gradually subsiding uproar it sounded clearer and more human. And again the strange light played about the two drenched and storm-tossed figures.

"All right?" Harry asked again.

"Yes — I —"

"That's all right," said Harry. "I'll let your head hang so you'll get rid of the water. I've got you tight — you can faint if you want to — you're safe."

"S-safe," gasped the other; "I —"

"Sure, you're safe."

Harry's arms tightened about the half-conscious form like a hoop of steel.

"All right down there?" a voice called.



"All right," Harry shouted.

"Both of you?"

"Both," called Harry. "All right; can you pull?"

The strange light encompassed the pair as slowly they rose, bruised and bleeding from the jagged projections, up the frowning wall. The wind thrust them against it, but Harry took the brunt of this as best he could, and dexterously maneuvered to keep his companion free.

Sometimes the rope creaked ominously and he feared it might give way, but the arms which clasped the other close and tight, held firm, and so, no doubt, they would have held if the two had gone down together.

"I—I know a chain—"

"That's all right," Harry soothed, believing his companion to be half delirious.

"Both alive?" came again from above.

"Sure!" yelled Harry.

"All right, then, George, you might as well," he heard the voice say.

Harry did not know how they came over the brink of the ravine, for he fainted just as some one grasped him. Yet even in his unconscious state, they had to unlock his fingers one by one to separate his two hands and release his hold upon the one he had rescued. It was Bobby Cullen who stooped and did this, and as he gently loosened the



fingers he saw how firmly they had been interlaced by the white spots where each finger had indented the opposite hand.

As the others lifted the figure of their rescued companion, Bobby saw who it was that Harry had brought up out of those black, tempestuous waters; saw who it was that the fellow he had shunned and called a "Panama prig" had found and brought back to him — the "lame Query" of Long Gulch!

Bobby did not follow Mr. Conne and the others who bore Wesley into the shredded remnant which had been a tent, but stayed just where he was, brushing that rebellious lock of wavy hair off the forehead of Harry's prostrate form, bathing the white face with water that the whirling cyclone had raised up from the river far below, and which lodged near by among the rocks and hollows.

When they came to bear Harry also into that forlorn shelter, Bobby seemed for the moment to resent it, as if none had any right here but himself, or were privileged to minister to his unconscious friend. For it was the same loyal, blindly steadfast and unreasoning Bobby, with all the prejudice which was part of his stanch devotion.

There is a popular impression abroad that in the famous "movie" play of "The Cyclone Hero" in three reels, a rag dummy was used and that it was this which the hero clasped in his dizzy and thrilling



ascent out of the ravine. Nothing could be further from the truth. "The Cyclone Hero," notwithstanding its breathless dramatic effect, was wholly an accidental production. No preparations for it had been made and no deceptive paraphernalia was used. If you have seen this sensational play you must have noticed how the limp, half-drowned figure, reaches out its hand instinctively to avoid the jagged cliffs. Such realistic precautions would be quite impossible in the case of a rag dummy.

Since the reels have become so famous, it is unfortunate that the really best part of this actual occurrence could not be made apparent in the films, for all one sees there is the thrilling action against the background of that terrific storm. Little the public dreams that the rescue not only reunited long lost friends, but fulfilled the hero's dream of some time falling in with his erstwhile and adventurous friend, Mr. Carleton Conne.

That is where a story is better than a motion-picture play.



## CHAPTER XXIII

### THE LAUGH IS ON HARRY

“AND if you’ve been making Lewis and Clarke reels,” said Harry, “we’ve got something that’ll interest you, haven’t we, Bobby?”

“We sure have,” said Bobby, “but we don’t want a word of it mentioned yet — see?”

“I will be as silent as the grave, Harry boy,” said Mr. Conne.

It was the next afternoon after the cyclone and all six of them — Harry, Wesley, Bobby, Andy Breen, George Warren and Mr. Conne — were seated (on such seats as they could find) in Bobby’s cabin. Wesley, after an absence of nearly a year which had taken him far among the South Sea Islands, had passed the night on his own cot here in his old familiar home. He had awakened to the strain of Bobby’s harmonica and eaten the breakfast which Bobby had cooked. Everything seemed the same. He had seen the captain in the morning (he had rather dreaded that interview) and had told him the whole story from the beginning.

“Well,” the captain had said, “then you did belong in Oakwood; I was puzzled as to why you



didn't go ashore there from the launch that day. I'm glad to see you, Wesley; and you're back just in time. Do you mean to go down the Mississippi with us?"

"M-may I?" Wesley had said with a touch of that old feeling of awe which he always experienced in the captain's brisk presence.

"Surely you may."

Then in the afternoon the Conne party had come in from their neighboring camp to find out how the rescuer and the rescued were coming on. They, likewise, had met the captain, for the boys exhibited him as one of the sights; they had inspected Uncle Sam's great work, and now they had come to rest a minute in the little cabin which, far or near, Wesley always thought of as home.

"When it comes to Lewis and Clarke," said Harry, hauling out a large zinc chest, "we've got it all over you. We've got something that will give you a lot of free advertising for your Lewis and Clarke reels."

"Hmmm," said Mr. Conne, "that'll be nice."

"When this gets into the papers," said Bobby, "the country will be so daft about anything connected with Lewis and Clarke that —"

"Why," interrupted Harry, "you'll be able to get fifty cents admission instead of ten!"

"That's good," said Mr. Conne, cocking his head and eyeing the box; "we'll all be rich then, eh,



Wesley? Well, Harry boy, what kind of an adventure is it now? Let's have it."

"Oh," said Bobby, catching the amused note in Mr. Conne's voice, "you can laugh, but I can tell you Harry Arnold ought to be in the Secret Service — he'd be getting fifty per. You can take that from me! Do you know what that is?"

"Seems to be a kind of box," said Mr. Conne.

"Looks like a box to me," volunteered Andy.

"That's my guess," said George Warren.

"Well, then, I'll tell you what it is," said Bobby proudly, ignoring Harry's modesty. "It's the box that Lewis and Clarke cached and couldn't find afterward, but *we* — I mean Harry — found it by deduction!"

"Good for you, Harry," said Mr. Conne; "there's no use anybody trying to hide anything from you. It's just a waste of time."

"It'll make a sensation all right inside of another month," said Harry boastfully.

"I shouldn't be surprised if it made a sensation in another minute. Let's look at the inside of it, Harry."

"Remember, now," said Harry, glancing around the little assemblage, "not a word of this to anybody until we've turned the things over to the Smithsonian Institute. We don't want it to leak out in the newspapers. And I don't want to be bothered by having a lot of reporters following me around," he added, rather arrogantly.



Proudly Harry and Bobby opened the box and the complacent, humorously critical look which Mr. Conne bestowed on the carefully-packed treasures would have made an entertaining picture film in itself.

“And those things have been in the ground since 1805,” said Harry impressively.

Mr. Conne stooped and picked up a small, dilapidated volume. “Funny,” said he, “that Lewis and Clarke should start off in 1805 with a copy of *Robinson Crusoe*, published in 1815. Let’s see some more things, Harry boy.”

“What?” said Harry.

“How?” said Bobby.

Mr. Conne gingerly picked up the torn American flag and shook it open. “Hmmm — I suppose this is the flag they used on their travels.— Wonder how many stars it’s got.— Let’s see — four — eight — sixteen — twenty — twenty-eight — thirty-six — forty-three — hmmm — forty-six stars.— Funny. Couldn’t have been *that* many states in 1805.” He did not appear to notice the crestfallen faces of the two young discoverers. Wesley saw Andy Breen wink at George Warren.

“What’s this, Harry boy?” said Mr. Conne, hauling out the cylindrical thing which looked like a peanut-roaster.

“I — I don’t know,” Harry stammered.

“Any idea what that is, Wesley?”



Wesley laughed. It had puzzled him once, even as it puzzled Harry and Bobby. "I think," said he, "that it's for making artificial smoke in motion-pictures. Put some of that black powder in the big bottle into the cylinder and try it, Harry."

To say that you could have knocked Harry down with a feather would be putting it mildly. In his vanquished and humiliated state, it would have been brutal to hit him with a feather. You could have knocked him down with a hair! Bobby sat on the couch close by the great detective, his head in his two hands.

"What did I say about that sod of earth?" he wailed. "Oh, what *did* I say about that sod of earth? I *said* it was an artificial sod and a fresh sod! Oh, why didn't I stick to it? Where are we at? What *are* we up against?"

The great deducer likewise buried his head in his hands.

"*Didn't* I say it was a fresh sod of earth?" moaned Bobby; "*didn't* I remind you of that little fact?"

"Don't talk to me about little facts," said the new Sherlock Holmes. "Hit us again, we're down! Let us know the worst!"

"Well, then," said Mr. Conne, placing his arm over Wesley's shoulder, as if he, at least, were to be trusted; "the worst is this, Harry. That after befriending you at Panama, letting you use my



quinine pills, rescuing your parrot from the wily Spaniard, helping to procure you the very medal which you wear,—how do you repay me? I repeat, *How* do you repay me? You go and break open my private storehouse and take the only pair of Indian pants which I owned. Look in the pocket and you'll find a subway ticket. *That* you may have, but give me back my Indian pants!"

His three faithful followers stood by him and his air was that of wounded confidence and just wrath. "You have copped our tom-tom," he continued mournfully, "and purloined our camera tripod."

Bobby's lowered head rocked woefully in his hands. "I thought it was a transit tripod," he groaned.

Mr. Conne fixed him with a look of scorn. "Captain Lewis's buckskin suit, for which I paid eight dollars and a half, is gone, and Captain Lewis, on his way east, has been put to the humiliation of wearing a golf suit!—A patent cigar lighter has gone with it!" he added, sadly.

"I never looked in the pockets," moaned Harry, miserably.

"Nor on the title page of *Robinson Crusoe*," said Mr. Conne. Then, changing his tone, "Harry," said he, "far be it from me to deprecate your deeds of heroism, but as a deducer—I would suggest, Harry boy, that when you are deducing it is just as well to look in the pockets."



Thus ended the remarkable adventure of The Lost Cache. The Conne party, it appeared, had availed themselves of the convenient expedient of caching a part of their property against their return, and the elusive cubby-hole of the redoubtable Lewis and Clarke is still a mystery.

Yet who shall say that Harry's quest was fruitless? He believes, to this day, that the four stones and the punky fragments which had once been a timber, mark the identical spot where the adventurous captains hauled their boat ashore and blocked it, preparatory to making camp. And Gordon Lord (who is a specialist on such things) is a stanch and voluble supporter of Harry's theory. He even sent a fragment of the rotten timber to the Smithsonian Institute, but despite the fact that they paid two cents extra postage on it, it is not to be found in the exhibit halls of that renowned and time-honored institution. It is possible that they regard the relic as too priceless to be thus imprudently shown, and Gordon believes this to be the case, citing the famous and deplorable instance of the theft of the Mona Lisa from the Louvre.

But if Harry suffered a disappointment, and even a measure of humiliation under Bobby's withering gaze, he had at least brought Wesley back and found the Conne party, and as he very truly (though rather inconsistently) observed, "What is



a lot of old buried junk compared with one's old-time friends?"

Bobby answered that the buried junk was as nothing, and that he had no interest in it anyway; yet often when the lost cache was mentioned, he was heard to murmur ruefully, "Oh, why didn't I stick to that little fact about the fresh sod of earth when he told me the Smithsonian Institute was getting ready to throw roses and violets at us? What are roses and violets compared with a little fact?"

The boys now learned that Wesley and Andy Breen had come to the Gulch the night before (Wesley to show Andy the locality) and that they had come after hours because of Wesley's disinclination to be seen and recognized.

Conway had given Andy the permit to involve the dam in a magnificent catastrophe (provided the dam was left intact).

It is not a part of our programme to linger for a sight of that stupendous spectacle, the destruction of Long Gulch Dam, which was one of the most effective ocular delusions that Mr. Conne's bold ingenuity ever conceived. Moreover, the device of the spiral curtains, by which one movement of toppling masonry was multiplied to produce the illusion of utter ruin, is pending patent and not to be publicly described until full legal protection has been established. It was a great occasion for the Gulch



and the only damage which was apparent afterward was a spot where Conway spilled a bottle of copying ink in the Headquarters doorway, in his haste to see the catastrophe.

"That will be a five-reel act, Harry boy," said Mr. Conne, "and now for the land of Cortez. I've had enough of this pilfering country. My wardrobe was copped and now my Captain Lewis is taken from me. If I camp around here much longer my watch will in all probability disappear. The captain was telling me that a few of you people are going down the Mississippi as far as Cairo to make mattresses and sheets and pillowcases and things for the Old Lady. Now, I'm going along to get a squint at that work,—educative reels, you know, that's what the Board of Censors is after. We've got our shanty-boat, the *Slow Poke*, down in Cairo. So you'll have us for company a ways."

Harry and Wesley both stared.

"I get my vacation when we break up at Cairo," said Harry.

"And I'm off to Oakwood to study for Civil Service," said Wesley.

"You remember Jack Holden, don't you, Mr. Conne?" Harry asked.

"The soldier boy? Well, I guess yes!"

"Well, he's been down in Mexico; I had a letter from him and he'll be home on leave about the time we strike Missouri. You know, he lives in Whit-



ville, right on the Mississippi. I'm going down there to see him."

"Well, well," said Mr. Conne. "Look here, Harry, here's a regular ring-around-the-rosey proposition, right hot out of the oven! Here's a plan where we can all get together and stand in a row when the curtain goes down. Regular old-fashioned melodrama, hey, Harry?"

"Let's hear it," Harry laughed.

"Well, the fact — now keep your seat, Harry, and hold your ear sideways — the fact is I'm about two-thirds of a mind to jump down into Mexico — via the Mississippi."

Harry jumped for Mr. Conne via the rough dining-board, and gripped his arm.

"Sure as you live," continued Mr. Conne, in his funny way. "Get right down there in the thick of it and reel up the whole business. I could run a special in New York with it at a dollar a head — easy. There's going to be some doings down there pretty quick. Old Huerta's got to be turned up and spanked — it'll make a great film."

Harry thought that such a performance would, indeed, make a most novel film.

"I've got the *Slow Poke* tied up in Cairo — I ever tell you about the *Slow Poke*, Harry? No?"

"It isn't a shanty-boat, is it?" Harry laughed.

"Well, Wesley knows all about it, for we've told him. Now, Harry, when you get as far as Cairo,



I want you three boys to come down to Baxter's Landing and I'll show you the *Slow Poke*. Then if you should feel like going on down the river with us to the Gulf, why —"

"If we should!" laughed Harry.

"I was only going to say," said Mr. Conne, "that you'll be welcome aboard the *Slow Poke* — provided you don't take any of our Wild West wardrobe —"

"Never again," said Bobby, grimly.

Harry's manifest delight reflected the eagerness of his two companions. To work down the Mississippi as far as Cairo and then to terminate their labors with a visit to Mexico in company with this original trio, seemed too good to be true. But something still better and equally true was to happen, if Harry had only known it.

"How's Gordon these days, Harry boy?" asked Mr. Conne, suddenly bethinking him of that active youngster whom he had met in Panama.

"Oh, he's all right," laughed Harry. "He's got a new proposition now called the Westward Ho Syndicate. I bought some stock and got a dividend of eleven cents not long ago. I haven't the slightest idea what the scheme is."

They all laughed and Mr. Conne shook his head, smiling reminiscently. "I'd rather see that kid again than a Mexican war any day," he mused. "He was as good as a joke-book." Gordon had been a great favorite with Mr. Conne.



“The only thing is,” said Harry, recurring to the proposed expedition, “could we stop at Whitville for a call on Jack? Would you be willing for the *Slow Poke* to stop so —”

“Harry,” said Mr. Conne, grimly, “I have no influence whatever with the *Slow Poke*. I can make no rash promises. She stops wherever and whenever she feels like it.”

“And she usually feels like it on an average of twice a minute,” said George Warren.



## CHAPTER XXIV

### ENTER THE SLOW POKE

"THERE you are," said Bobby, pointing across to the Illinois shore; "there she is — old Rough and Ready! Jiminy crinks, but that reminds me of old times!"

It was the morning of the third day down from St. Louis, and the three boys were looking from the rail of one of the big Mississippi government boats as she steamed into the stretch of river where the government work was going on.

Several hundred feet back from the Illinois shore there arose a long, grassy hummock, beyond which could be seen the tops of houses and a church spire. It continued far to the south, disappearing at the next bend of the river.

"Is that a levee?" Harry asked.

"It seems too abrupt on this side," Wesley ventured.

"Listen to the engineer," said Bobby. "Its slope is on the other side, dearie, and it protects four villages and goodness knows how many square miles of land. I've seen the water right up to the



very top of that, but never a crevasse.<sup>1</sup> Hey, Easter," he called, "here's old Gibraltar!"

Easter came out eagerly.

"Easter and I were the first ones to walk on that levee, weren't we, Easter? There's a foot-path its whole length — runs way down to Conner's Landing. That was before Query was ever heard of," he added mischievously. "That's the principal thing levees are for, isn't it, Easter? For fellows and girls to walk on. Many's the time Easter and I —"

"We didn't!" said Easter.

"Didn't what?" said Bobby.

"You think you're smart, don't you?" she retorted, weakly.

"Do you deny that I used to row out every evening and get you for a walk on the levee?" demanded Bobby. There was no answer to this except Easter's heightened color, and Bobby gave the back of Wesley's head a vigorous push and winked at Harry.

"I surveyed all the way down to the landing," said Bobby, with that ingenuous boastfulness which characterized him, and which was robbed of all conceit; "and came up on Stillson's dredge — remember, Easter? And there's the old back-stop they're working on. We'll be in at the finish, Easter. I bet the Arizona bunch is there!"

<sup>1</sup> Crevasse; a hole in the levee.



The lumbering boat was now headed for shore, where other similar ones were anchored and a tug went steaming about.

"She's going to be a good big one," said Bobby, eyeing the unfinished stretch of levee. "If we're in at the finish I'll have a nice quiet walk on her with — Harry." He gave Wesley's head another significant push. "What do you think Easter did — Oh, oi, oi, oi," he broke off; "if there isn't Pickle Edwards! They've been tagging them from all over the country. Look, Easter! Where's my harmonica? I'll give 'em 'The Old Folks at Home'! Oh, mother, mother, pin a rose on me if there isn't Mack! Hello, you long-lost —"

Harry was almost angry with the girl that she did not catch Bobby's enthusiasm and join in those pleasant memories as he rattled on. There was something so wholesome and friendly about Bobby. But as the big steamer approached the shore she did fall into his spirit and laughed with him and told him not to be absurd, and the evidence of the long, even friendship between them was very pleasant to see. Harry and Wesley envied them as they pointed out to each other people they had known before in their country-wide excursions under Uncle Sam.

It would be pleasant, no doubt, to linger with the party as they steamed down the Mississippi,



but it must suffice for us to hasten on to the extraordinary experiences which awaited the three boys.

It was during that period of work on the levees that Wesley reëstablished his title to the nickname which Mike had given him, so that when the time at last came for breaking up he was pretty well versed in the peculiarities and tactics of the great river.

It was a beautiful spring day when they floated into Cairo, where the "Pilgrims of the Gulch," as they had been dubbed, were scattered to the four winds. Captain Craig went to Washington to explain the need of some appropriations and to prepare for his trip to Alaska. Mr. Barney went up the Ohio with the Merricks for channel and revetment work. Mike had remained on the levees above, while Mack and Pickle Edwards went off on survey work in the Ozarks.

Harry, you will understand, was now regularly in government service, and he and Bobby were on leave. Wesley's programme was to prepare for Civil Service (which he sorely regretted he had not done two years before) and leave the rest to Captain Craig.

The purpose of the trio was now to hunt out the *Slow Poke*, cast their lot with the Conne party and continue down the river on pleasure and adventure bent.

For a while it seemed as if they were not going



to make connections for the wharves and floats showed no hint of the *Slow Poke*. They were just beginning to fear that the elusive Mr. Conne had already proceeded down stream when Wesley espied a homely stove-pipe rearing its rusty length from among a group of small craft, and close beside it a pennant bearing the words, EXCELSIOR FILMS. They went down the wharf and found a strange contraption which bore some resemblance to a mooring-float, with a small peaked-roof house at one end of it. A dilapidated tent which the boys thought they recognized was pitched on the spacious deck and across one side of the house displayed with unblushing brazenness the words, in large black letters, EXCELSIOR FILMS ARE FULL OF ACTION. On another side appeared the bold-faced announcement, HISTORY REPEATS ITSELF IN EXCELSIOR FILMS, while nestling more modestly below this sentence was the red-lettered claim that EXCELSIOR FILMS ARE TRUE AND WHOLESOME AND TAKE YOU BACK TO NATURE; and a good-sized flag proclaimed that EXCELSIOR FILMS ARE EDUCATIVE.

On the platform, which I suppose should be called deck, were two or three kitchen chairs and despite the ramshackle and wholly incongruous appearance of this preposterous boat, there was nevertheless a suggestion of homely comfort about it.

"Reminds you of Mike's hat, doesn't it?" said Bobby, surveying the signs. "I'll bet a hundred



dollars against a doughnut we have some fun on this thing."

Such a craft would have been quite outlandish on the Hudson, and along the river at home in Oakwood it would have given rise to unholy mirth on the part of Brick Parks and his ilk. But on the Mississippi every freak device is seen and in the bohemian fraternity of the great stream no one would look twice at the boastful *Slow Poke*. For the mighty, heedless river has taught the good lesson of independence to those who dwell upon it. The "Old Lady" has always done pretty much as she pleases and encouraged her denizens to do the same.

The boys softly opened the door and stepped into — what appeared to be the fifteenth century. A personage in priestly vestments arose and gripped the hand of Wesley. Another personage arose, cocked his head sideways, worked a cigar over to the extreme corner of his mouth and advanced toward Harry, with a whimsical, but cordial air. He wore a great black hat with an enormous red feather on it, a gray suit trimmed with gorgeous lace, knickerbockers tied with great bows at the knee and rosetted pumps.

"What in the name of —" began Harry.

"Harry boy, you are face to face with the great La Salle. Allow me to introduce you to Father Hennipen — the renowned Jesuit missionary. We



have just escaped from a tribe of Indians and are about to tackle a couple of hot frankfurters — if Andy will be good enough to stir up the fire. Mr. Cullen, if you will kindly remove that train-robber's suit you will find a comfortable seat beneath. Harry, I don't know whether to trust you in here or not."

"We won't take anything," laughed Harry.

"Never again," said Bobby.

"Then," said Mr. Conne, beginning to remove his gorgeous raiment, "let bygones be bygones and welcome to the *Slow Poke*. When did you reach Cairo?"

You may imagine with what delight and anticipation the three boys joined the party, and if the *Slow Poke* proved worthy of her name (which she certainly did) it only made their progress more enjoyable. She gloried in a one-cylinder, four horse power engine, and it seemed hardly less than brutal to make it do the work of propelling that lumbering craft. On the second day out Wesley had a quiet little heart-to-heart talk with this engine and persuaded it to run a little better.

Thus they advanced majestically down stream, camping on islands, where Harry did the cooking, and working out the last La Salle reel, in which the historic assassination of the intrepid explorer was enacted. When they passed New Madrid, Harry kept a weather eye out along the Missouri shore,



for he knew that Whitville must now be close at hand, where he hoped to find his soldier friend, Jack Holden. He had no knowledge of Jack's home, more than what Jack and Gordon had told him, for Gordon had stopped there on his own journey down the river with his uncle and cousins, the Howells, while en route for Panama.

"Do you know," said George Warren, "I think the river's rising; look off there!"

"Spreading, you mean," said Mr. Conne; "she'll be up against that levee to-morrow. Well, doesn't make much difference how high she runs or how wide, long as we're on top of her."

"It might make a difference to some people," said Wesley.

That night they tied the *Slow Poke* to a tree alongshore and, it being cold, spent the night in the little house, Mr. Conne entertaining the three guests with tales of his adventures. In the morning the *Slow Poke* was on the other side of the tree where had been dry land the night before. A marshy area just below them was undoubtedly filling.

During the day they passed through a fairly populated region, protected by levees, and here the rise, occasioned by the confinement of the river to its minor bed, was graphically visible in tree-tops sticking out of the water, apparently from submerged islands. The boys were a little apprehen-



sive and very much interested. Mr. Conne noticed that Wesley was intent upon every aspect and manifestation of what was going on. He seemed to have detached himself from the others and was studying the river as an astronomer might scrutinize some new star.

At dusk they had reached a point where the river seemed abnormally wide, and they gazed far off across a veritable sea where the Kentucky shore should have been visible. Both shores (at one of which they must tie up for the night) seemed an unconscionable distance away.

"She takes plenty of elbow room wherever she gets the chance," commented Mr. Conne.

It was, in one sense, a magnificent spectacle to see with what bland assurance of prior right the mighty river spread slowly across the occasional vast areas of waste land which she still claims for her own; but save for these places she rose rather than spread, flanked by the levees.

"She must have looked like an inland sea before the levees were built," said Harry.

Late that afternoon they tied up close by a levee, against which the rising waters lapped innocently. But the stream had spread two hundred yards before reaching this bulwark and the *Slow Poke* was moored over flooded land. Over the summit of the levee the tops of houses seemed to be peeking surreptitiously at the strangers.



The inhabitants of the place came up on the levee and chatted with them. They wanted to know if the *Slow Poke* sold medicines, particularly a "rheumatiz cure,"—which threw some light on the kind of medical service which prevails along the great river, where the doctor is apt to be a quack doctor and to travel in a shanty-boat.

The people did not seem at all alarmed, their chief feeling being one of disappointment that the *Slow Poke* had no motion-picture entertainment to offer. They blamed the flood to the Ohio, and said that the water would *subside* before it reached the top of the levees. Near the *Slow Poke* was moored a "Gospel Boat," and a few, in lieu of a motion-picture show, scrambled down and into this. Presently, "Bridgework Bennet" (according to the sign on his ramshackle craft) floated in. The boys thought the "Bridgework" might pertain to government engineering until Bridgework Bennet himself appeared and announced that he would fill teeth for two bits apiece while the flood lasted, and his boat was forthwith overrun with customers.

The boys were amused to see how the flood was so far from perilous that it was actually providential, enabling the floating population to bring its wares and entertainments to the very foot of the levee.

"Flood's like a circus come to town, isn't it?" said Mr. Conne.



"I hope Bloten comes along before it *subsides*," said a woman. "I want to get a yard more calico same's I got last flood."

"How far is it to Whitville?" Harry asked.

"Who ye want daown there?"

"Oh, some one. How far is it?"

"Ye ain't wantin' Nick Slade? He's a play-actor."

"No," said Harry; "fellow by the name of Holden."

"Not Devil Jack?"

Harry laughed. "Well, that might suit him," said he.

"He's in the army," one volunteered.

"He's ter hum," another corrected.

"He's kilt," said another.

"No, he hain't kilt, neither. He wuz bobbin' fer eels last week — he wuz. I seed him."

"Holdens don't live ter Whitville," another called.

"They git ther' mail ter Whitville," protested some one.

"Tain't no fault of hisen if he wuzn't kilt," said a woman.

Harry could not help chuckling at the truth of this remark.

A tall man, wearing a sombrero and with a distinctly cowboyish aspect, appeared, brushing these contending informants aside and speaking in a rich,



resonant voice, "Holdens live out t' the end uv the bend."

"What bend?" called Mr. Conne.

"Little Snake Bend. You're at the top uv it naow. 'Bove this is Angleworm Bend. Then the next one b'low's Big Snake Bend. Ye jest keep right on daown, follerin' this here shore; don't go 'cross the way or she may take ye over the marrshes. Keep right along here. Ye'll pass a row o' hills. Holdens' place is the fust one ye see after them. It's right close b'the shore."

The voyagers had had no idea that Jack Holden's home was so near.

As they chugged along the Missouri shore, the discordant croaking of frogs in the marshes, the paling glint of sunlight on the waters, and the growing chill in the air, heralded the coming of a night which was to be momentous in the lives of all the party.



## CHAPTER XXV

### THE MISSISSIPPI SIDESTEPS

THE direction of the river at the little village where the party had stopped was southwest. A short distance below it made an abrupt turn to the southeast, then a more sweeping turn and ran southwest again. Within the upper and sharper bend was a patch of marshy country with low hills between it and the river. Near the extreme end of this lower and wider turn was the isolated home of Jack Holden; and below, along the lower southwestern stretch of the stream, was the village of Whitville. You will see by glancing at the map that Whitville was directly south of the sharp upper bend.

For a short distance the *Slow Poke* sailed southwest, along a fairly straight line of shore. The bordering land was fast dissolving into darkness and the swarming legions of insect pests betokened the neighborhood of the marshes. To their right, far across the stream, could be seen a line of low hills, a tangible and solid black against the less substantial darkness. They formed one of the few



LITTLE SNAKE BEND

Showing the cut-off at the time of  
Harry's going ashore from the Slowpoke.

CUT-OFF IN  
PROCESS OF  
MAKING

WHITVILLE

MARY

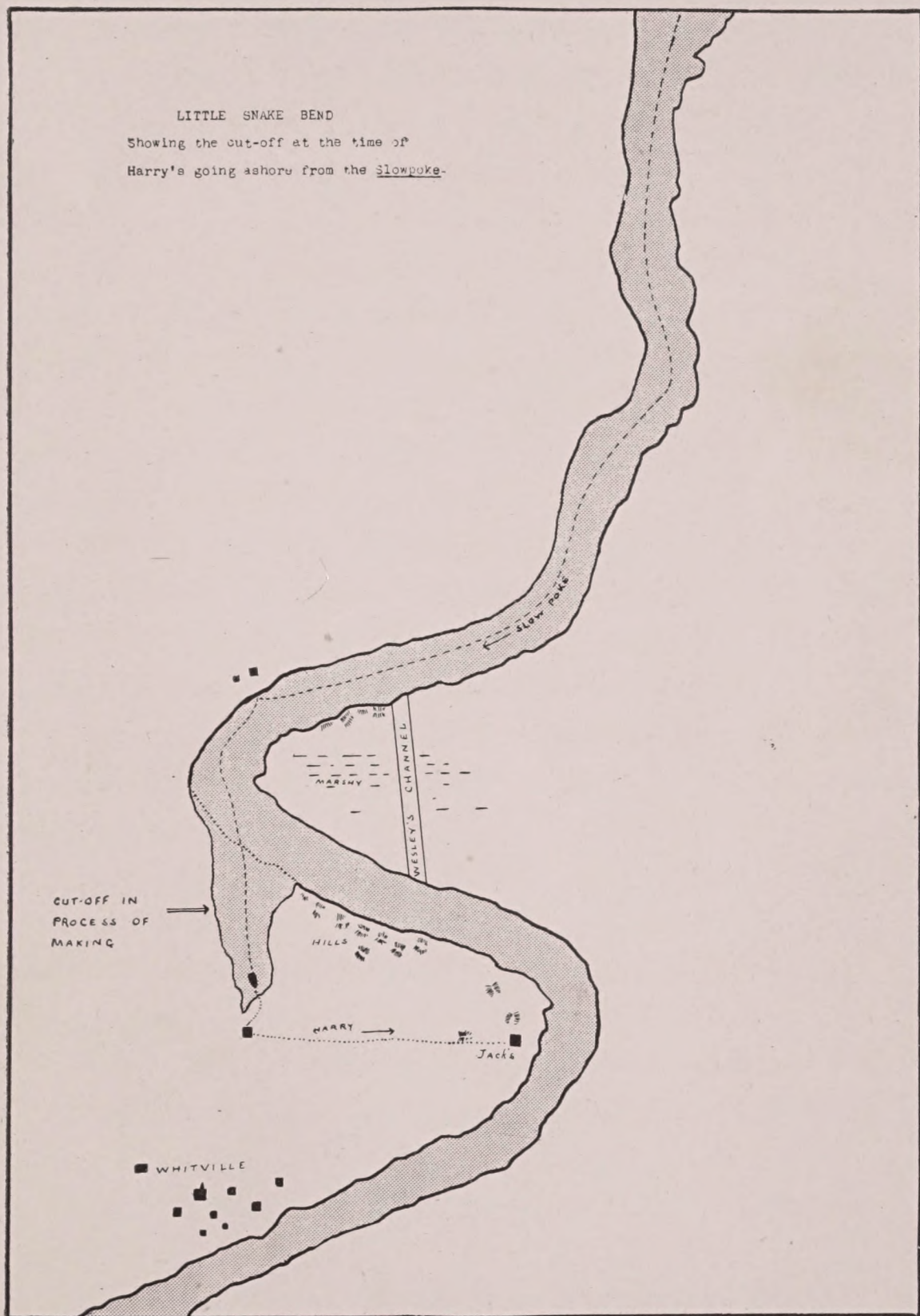
WESLEY'S CHANNEL

HILLS

HARRY

JACK

SLOW POKE









natural bulwarks which nature has vouchsafed to man in his struggle with the great river.

"It seems to me," said Mr. Conne, "that if this turn, or bend, or whatever they call it, is going to keep up its reputation for sharpness it had better be about it."

"We may have made the turn already," said Harry; "you don't realize it in the dark. A river as wide as this can't make a *very* sharp turn."

"Oh, can't it, though," said Bobby. "It can tie itself into a four-in-hand inside of a mile, let me tell you!"

"Well," said Mr. Conne, looking at his little watch-charm compass, "she's started to bend already, but it isn't going to be as sharp a bend as I expected, for we're headed due south now."

"I wish we had a bottle of mosquito dope," said Wesley, bestowing a murderous and resonant slap upon his own face.

It seemed, indeed, that the people who had directed them were wrong. The *Slow Poke* had come southwest, following the Missouri shore closely, then instead of turning abruptly eastward, the party found themselves sailing due south.

Presently, a light became visible directly before them.

"Do you suppose that's another boat?" Harry asked.

"No, it's on shore," said Mr. Conne. "I think



it's a house. That's where we turn east, I suppose."

Pretty soon they found that the shore was as close to them on one side as on the other, and they decided that they had run into a deep bay and were almost at the end of it.

"You don't suppose that could be Jack's place, do you?" Harry said. "I've a sneaking idea we made that bend without knowing it."

"Well," said Mr. Conne, "I suppose any idea is better than none. I have none. I'll take the bend on faith; I'm not aware of any bend. But I'm going to tie up at this shore and inquire of that kindly light where we are at, and suspend operations until morning."

They moored the *Slow Poke* to a willow which stood in the water and Harry waded to shore and started in the direction of the light. About ten minutes after he had gone, Bobby decided to go also and was surprised to find that the distance of a few feet which Harry had waded across was now increased to a hundred feet or more. The water seemed shallow all the way, but he did not venture far, returning instead to the *Slow Poke*.

"We've drifted away," he said, climbing breathless and saturated, onto the deck. "Look where the shore is!"

"I can't see where the shore is," said Wesley.

"But the *Slow Poke*," said Mr. Conne in his dry



way, "is still nestling alongside the weeping willow."

"Well, what's going on anyway?" said Bobby. "Where are we at?"

"Is that a conundrum?" asked Mr. Conne.

"Couldn't we get out the limelight?" Wesley asked. "Perhaps it would give us a line on what's doing. How's Harry going to get back anyway?"

The plain fact was, as you, who see the map, will appreciate, that they were indeed near the end of a long, narrow bay whose length was increasing every minute.

"Well," said Mr. Conne, "if the shore is moving away, I think we had better follow it."

So they unfastened the *Slow Poke* and let her drift toward the light which Harry had followed.

Meanwhile, Harry had reached the house and knocked at the door, which was opened by a tall, raw-boned young man.

"Have you any idea where Holdens live?" Harry inquired. "I came off a boat right down here at the shore; we're sort of lost or strayed."

The fellow stared at him blankly. "Yer come all the way down from the river?" he asked.

"Right down there," said Harry.

"Where?"

"Where?" repeated Harry, laughing; "I'll show you the light in our boat; we —"

"Ye can't see no light on the river from here," said the fellow.



But the *Slow Poke* was even nearer now than when Harry had left it, and he pointed out her small lantern light flickering in the darkness.

"That ain't on the river?" the young man almost shrieked.

"Oh, but it is," said Harry.

For a moment the other stared straight at him with a look that Harry never forgot, then he turned and rushing into the house, called, "She's cutting! The river's cutting!"

Harry was conscious of an old woman coming down the stairs mumbling and wringing her hands, and of a second man in the room. He did not know how the man came there; but he saw that the information which he had unconsciously brought them was of perilous import. From that minute everything which happened seemed all jumbled together and when all was over, it seemed to him as if everything after those words, "She's cutting! The river's cutting!" had happened in a dream.

At the moment, all he realized was that he had come upon the crest of the advancing waters, and heralded their approach. He knew now that the river proper was far away and he saw that he had brought such consternation and terror into this quiet, unsuspecting home, that questions and explanations were impossible.

But you, who see the conformation of the country as it existed that night (though changing every



minute), can form some idea of the phenomenon which was taking place, and of which the voyagers had only the haziest knowledge.

If the sharp, upper bend of the river had been amply revetted the increasing volume of water would have swept around the turn and the worst that would have happened would probably have been an overflow in the immediate neighborhood. But instead of that the insidious inroads of erosion had been at work, the river was taking a path of less resistance and plowing a new and shorter channel for itself which would soon engulf the house where Harry had stopped, blot Whitville off the map, and leave Jack Holden's house beside an empty mud ditch!

The young fellow, after a few hasty words with the older man, during which the old woman wrung her hands piteously, went out, evidently bent on running to Whitville with the appalling news. The older man hurried toward the approaching waters.

"Where do the Holdens live?" Harry asked of the old woman. "Tell me if you know, please."

He saw that he could be of no use where he was and he resolved to reach Jack's if possible. He did not know just what was happening, except that there was evidently a flood, and that all the neighborhood was in imminent peril. He made out from her excited mumbling that Jack's home was directly east. A half a mile away, to the south, he



could see the lights at Whitville, and relying on the scout compass which he always carried he started running due east. His way took him over low, level land with marshy patches here and there, and after running for fifteen or twenty minutes he became aware of black hills and between them glinting, faint glimpses of the river. He thought the marshy patches he had passed through must be the first waters of the rising flood, but he was mistaken. His confusion and excitement caused him to picture the whole locality rapidly inundating.

Soon he came around the edge of a hill, almost stumbling upon a little cottage. A few yards away, over the tops of the levees, he could see as he came down the hill the river, quite plain now, and apparently flowing on dutifully and harmlessly.

He gave the cottage door such a bang as it had probably never known before. A window was opened and a woman's voice asked who was there.

"She's cutting! The river's cutting!" he panted, unconsciously using the same phrase he had heard a few minutes before. "Is this Holden's?"

Just then the door flew open and Harry staggered in. A tall fellow with light hair stood holding the door and gaping.

"H'lo — Jack," Harry gasped. "Hurry up — the river's flooding — or something — from the — bend — up there. Whitville's in — danger!"

Jack, amazement in every line of his face, came toward him.



"Oh, it's me, all right," Harry panted. "I came on the — flood; I'll tell you — later; Mr. Conne and Andy — I'll — I'll tell you — later —"

There was no time for talk and Jack's astonishment at Harry's arrival was drowned in his alarm at the dreadful news he brought. Yet to Jack, too (who had just been dreaming), the events of that night always seemed a part and parcel of his real dream; a phantasmagoria where all was topsyturvy and explanation superfluous.

In a minute they were hurrying toward Whitville. There they joined a squad of men who were going northward with picks and shovels to reinforce others who had gone on the first alarm. The bell on the little church was peeling frantically. Every house was lighted and the whole village was astir.<sup>1</sup> The news seemed to have reached them that the flood was "rattled," which Jack said meant that the river was a little embarrassed to find a way in its newly-chosen path.

Some of the people were loading household goods upon wagons. A few (there are always Philistines) decried and belittled the danger, boldly proclaiming that they intended to stay where they were. One old man was saying he *knew* the "missis" would some day seek her former bed, from

<sup>1</sup> It must be remembered that in these phenomena known as cut-offs, the flood is usually not violent and overwhelming, the water, on the contrary, picking its way, as it were, gingerly, in its new and unmarked channel.



which Harry inferred that she had once flowed this way before the birth of Whitville. Sleepy, half-dressed children were being brought forth, crying and bewildered.

Harry and Jack followed the men northward and for a little way had a chance for explanation and more leisurely greetings.

The little army of lantern-bearing villagers trudged on, a swarm of insect life surrounding each light, among which scores of mammoth maybugs banged themselves against glass and human forms, going the pace that kills, living out their brief and aimless careers and dropping by the wayside.

After a little the advance guard of the approaching river was discernible in little marshy patches here and there and wandering, uncertain streams poking and insinuating this way and that like very scouts in truth, seeking out the best path for the swelling legion behind them to plow its way through.

The object of the men was evidently not to attempt to restore to and hold the river in the bend, but simply by judicious digging and the throwing up of makeshift levees, to entice it out of the path to Whitville, while still its moderate volume made such a course feasible.

"And the gentle Mississippi won't flow past your home any more then, will it?" Harry panted, quoting from Jack's own letter.

"It's the only thing they can do, old man, if it



isn't too late to do even that," Jack answered as they hurried along. "They — they *must* save the village."

"Seems to me," said Harry, "that a great big heartless monster like this river won't let a hundred men or so tell her where to go! She's too much for them."

"She's a coward," said Jack, breathing heavily; "*we* know her! She'd back down at the sight of one little civil engineer. It's — like wrestling — you've got to know where to grab her."

"Are there any engineers in Whitville?"

"Not a one; be good if Barney was here, wouldn't it?"

"They can't dig a channel big enough for this river," Harry said, incredulously.

"No, but they can start it making a channel for itself. There's a story about a child starting a cut-off on the Mississippi with a toy shovel.— How long's this been going on?"

"Since before dark, I think," said Harry.

Soon they stood ankle-deep at a place where the upper part of a house could be seen in the water a few yards away. As they looked, a long, dusky shaft moved upward from the house, inscribed a great half circle in the air and descended slowly upon them. Instantly, they became luminous to each other. It moved away and threw its circle of light about the men near by. By its aid they could



see that the water was all about them and Harry wondered where and how in this scene of inundation and darkness when the familiar geography of the neighborhood was all askew, the men would set about their all but hopeless task.

A voice came from the house and gazing intently toward it the boys could distinguish something bobbing alongside. Then it dawned upon Harry that the light was Mr. Conne's calcium.

"I'm going to swim out to them, Jack," he said. "Maybe they'll have some news or some idea. I'll be back."

"I'm with you," said Jack.

But it was only for the last few feet of the way that they had to swim. They found the *Slow Poke* moored to the house where Harry had first called. Despite the grotesqueness and growing danger of the whole situation, he could not repress a certain feeling of amusement at thinking how all this would make a most novel and thrilling "movie" play, but for once Mr. Conne seemed to have no thought of the "main chance."

Wesley was in the cabin poring over a map which had been brought from the house. The old woman, still wringing her hands, was in the *Slow Poke*. Her men folk had joined the workers. Bobby came into the little cabin where Harry and Jack stood, and where Wesley sat absorbed in his map.

"Do you know," said Bobby, in an undertone, in-



dicating Wesley by an inclination of his head; "that takes me back a year and a half. He looks just as he did the day he showed me his East Hill scheme. It was the next morning the captain sent him up there."

He stepped across the little room and laid his hand familiarly on Wesley's back with a suggestion of pride and affection which was not lost on the others. Over Wesley's shoulder he, too, looked at the map, which was similar to the one shown here.

"What are they going to do?" said Wesley, turning to Harry. There was something in his manner which suggested a certain detachment from the others, as if he were sufficient unto himself. Yet it was not an air of assurance. Whatever it was, Harry answered quietly, almost as if he had been speaking with Captain Craig.

"I don't know; the whole town is out."

"Where?"

"Where we just came from."

"They can't do anything between here and Whitville," said Wesley soberly.

"They can't do much anywhere else, I'm afraid," said Jack.

Wesley turned toward him as if he had not seen him before. "Do you live in Whitville?"

"Near it."

"Are there any engineers there?"

"They'd starve to death if there were," said Jack in his offhand way.



“Then you people will have to take my word for it. I’ve worked under Captain Craig — you Mississippi people know him, I suppose. This is a fight, you know; that’s the way you have to think of it; that’s the way *he* always thinks of it. We can’t win out with brute power. There’s one thing he told me that I’ve never forgotten — when you’re fighting the most important thing is to cut off your enemy’s base of supplies. We’ve got to take the river where she isn’t looking. If you want to save Whitville and keep the stream in her course, you’ve got to make a flank move and attack her in the rear.”

Mr. Conne came in and stood quietly by. His head was cocked sideways in that familiar listening way, but the whimsical expression was absent. He, too, seemed under the spell. As Harry looked at the little group, marooned as they were, with the enemy all about them, and at Wesley sitting there with a lead pencil poised in his hand, he felt a new respect for the profession and the training which enabled one to calmly plan out a way of still circumventing the besieging foe.

“You see,” said Wesley, quietly, “this is what should be done. Here’s a marshy patch. A little deflective start and the river will cut across that. Probably she’d plow a strip through it with a little clearing of the way and not use it all. But you can’t tell. Anyway, she won’t flood the south side of the bend because of the hills there. The current would



flow into the regular bed just east of these hills and it wouldn't flood the south shore because of those other hills there. It's a case of natural deflection, only they've got to take her and stick her nose into it like a kitten before she'll get busy. Then she'll flow right around the lower bend. It may result in cutting off the upper bend and maybe not — I don't know. But if they can show her a way through that marsh and give her a start, that's an end to the flooding north of Whitville. They'll have to pump out their cellars, that's about all. If they do what they're starting to do now they won't succeed,— a thousand men wouldn't succeed. But this way, she'd be kept in the long bend and they'd save Whitville."

"You think so?" said Mr. Conne.

"I know so," said Wesley.

"I believe it's what the captain would do," said Bobby.

There was a moment's silence.

"Trouble is," said Wesley, throwing down his pencil with an air of disgust, "we can't make these people see it. I know what ought to be done," he added, with a suggestion of his old sneer, "it's as plain as A B C. All I wanted was to get a squint at the lay of the land. The swamp is with us and the hills on both sides are with us — but how can *I* — I've no influence with those men!" Then with a touch of bitterness he added, "I'm only L.H.



You can't expect any one to act on *my* tip. Those men would laugh at me!"

There was another silence.

"Andy," said Mr. Conne, in his crisp, business-like tone, "suppose you dump the row-boat in the water and one of you boys can row me over to where those lanterns are and I'll have a little heart-to-heart talk with the men. Give me that map, Wesley."

It was Bobby who literally snatched the sheet from his friend, and as he handed it over Harry looked at Mr. Conne and laughed outright. No doubt if that laugh could have been put in words it would have expressed this thought; that knowledge of how to persuade and convince and influence men is after all quite as splendid and important as the ability to checkmate and circumvent a great river!



## CHAPTER XXVI

### WESTWARD HO

I SUPPOSE it is needless to remind you that a scout always keeps his word, and when Gordon Lord, Beaver Patrol, 1st Troop, Oakwood, N. J., told Harry that he would meet him in the West, he meant exactly what he said, neither less nor more.

On the day that Harry left Oakwood for Washington several of the troop went into the city to see him off. Conspicuous among these were Brick Parks, Roy Carpenter and Gordon himself; and to this enterprising trio, of which Gordon was the moving spirit, must be attributed the organization, financing and successful carrying forward of the Busy Beavers Amalgamated, Consolidated Westward-Ho Syndicate, which had its origin that very day.

The name of the concern originated exclusively with Gordon, and though it was long it might have been a good deal longer. He debated much as to whether to use the word, Company, Association or Syndicate, and he chose Syndicate because it had a commercial and financial sound which he liked. He could not decide between the words, Amalgamated



and Consolidated, so he used them both. He came very near using the word, United, also, but couldn't find another n among his type so omitted it; and the abbreviation, Inc., was omitted for the same reason. He always regretted that he had left out the word, Limited. The original idea was Busy Beavers Amalgamated, Consolidated Westward-Ho Company and Syndicate, Inc., and Limited.

It is at the brief history of this flourishing institution that we must now take a hasty glimpse.

The sole purpose of the organization, as set forth by Gordon, was by some hook or crook to enable the entire troop of Oakwood scouts to accompany him as far west as St. Louis and there fulfill his promise of joining Harry on his return from the upper Missouri.

How this was to be accomplished the three boys had not the faintest idea, but as Gordon said, the first thing was to organize, so organize they did, trusting to his versatile brain to "find a way."

The very next day a deputation of scouts, headed by Gordon himself, waited upon Mr. Danforth (railroad magnate, patron of the Oakwood scouts and admirer of Harry Arnold) at his big house on the hill and pleaded their cause so well that Mr. Danforth agreed to turn over to them an old freight car which they might fit up as traveling headquarters and to "use his influence" to have it attached to trains moving west.



Next the committee made for the office of Dr. Brent, their scoutmaster, and extorted from him a promise to accompany the expedition. (Gordon said the doctor needed a vacation anyway.)

So with the means of conveyance already provided and the doctor's promise to "chaperon" the party, what could the parents of the boys do but consent, and there was the enterprise well launched within twenty-four hours of its conception!

Large undertakings like that of the Busy Beavers Amalgamated, Consolidated Westward-Ho Syndicate are necessarily subject to delays. For instance it took time to locate and ship to Oakwood a freight car which would make a suitable traveling camp. It took time also for the printing and marketing of an issue of stock in order to raise funds for the necessary alterations and fitting up of the car for the long overland trip.

There was much to be done on it. Indeed to any one except the energetic scouts it might have appeared almost hopeless on first inspection. But the boys could do most of the work themselves and it only remained to purchase the necessary material and supplies.

When Mr. Danforth heard of the stock issue, he not only subscribed for a large block of stock but sent to the treasurer besides a liberal check with the message that if anything was left after the out-



fitting of the car, the boys should divide it among themselves. (Hence the eleven-cent dividend which Harry Arnold received at Long Gulch.)

Many months were consumed in the renovation of the car, which included the painting in large white letters along its sides of the name, WESTWARD HO. When at last it was ready for the trip it presented quite a sumptuous appearance. Bunks were arranged for sleeping quarters, which some of the girls had furnished with embroidered cushions in order that the place might seem home-like. An old stove from the laundry of Brick Parks' home, a rough dining-board, and various dishes and camping paraphernalia, were installed, and two windows placed in each side of the car for light and ventilation.

The plan was to proceed leisurely west stopping by the way whenever the spirit moved. As it turned out, they stopped many times when the spirit didn't move as well, and if I were to tell you of the many ludicrous incidents of the trip; the times they found themselves marooned on lonely sidings by reason of broken couplings or through the stupidity of wayside station agents; the many interesting side trips which they took, sometimes of their own accord and sometimes through misunderstandings with the railroad officials, I should have no space left to tell of the extraordinary things which happened after they finally reached the Mississippi.



There was the time, for instance, when they woke one morning to find themselves attached to a cattle train and headed straight for the Chicago stock-yards.

"Here we go, all ready for the sausage bags!" cried Howard Brent, amid much laughter and joking, when the mistake was discovered.

"I go in a Boy Scout, I'll come out extract of beef!" said Pierce.

"In nice little cubes, all wrapped up in tinfoil," added another.

Gordon was appointed special troop historian for the trip and their many exciting experiences are all faithfully set forth in the ponderous tome in which he recorded in most minute detail the events of those few months. It may be that I can some day get him to tell you the story in his own picturesque fashion.

At St. Louis the party joined forces with the Mock Turtles, that renowned patrol of western scouts to which Gordon's cousins, Will and Joe Howell, belonged. According to Gordon's schedule, there would be several weeks to spare before Harry was due to reach St. Louis on his way back from the Far West, and he now conceived the novel idea of removing the trucks of the *Westward Ho* and placing the body of the car on a huge float which would enable the two troops to fill in the time before Harry's arrival by taking a trip down the river in



true Mississippi fashion as far as Whitville and there calling at the home of the Holdens, where Gordon had stopped overnight on his previous journey down the great river.

To this plan his cousins enthusiastically agreed and of course the other boys "fell in line" as soon as the scheme was laid before them.

So under the supervision of Dr. Brent and Mr. Howell (whose scientific mind was rather shocked at the proceeding) the *Westward Ho* was converted into one of the most unique shanty-boats on the river, and the Amalgamated Scouts, as Gordon insisted upon calling them, started on their leisurely journey downstream.

The *Westward Ho*, of course, was not equipped with any sort of power, but following the usual custom of Mississippi shanty-boats, drifted southward with the current, its course being guided somewhat by means of sweeps, or long oars, and relied upon being towed back up the river by some steamboat upon the payment of a small fee.

The first stop they made was at the little village of Ste. Genevieve, about fifty miles below St. Louis. Pierce and two of the other boys went ashore for fresh provisions, and when they returned they brought with them a copy of a handbill which was being circulated about the docks. You have only to read for yourself to imagine what excitement this created among the boys.



**\$500.00 REWARD**

For information leading to the arrest and conviction of one Thomas (alias "Crowbar") Slade and five companions.

Bert (alias "Dink") Carpenter  
Joseph Flynn (Alias "Switch Joe")  
Fred (alias "Westy") Rinckell  
Donald McCarthy  
"Yeggy" Butler

All fugitives from justice and under indictment in Adams County, Illinois, for highway robbery in derailing and robbing Express Train No. 24, on Wabash Road.

Thought to have gone down Mississippi from Quincy in a shanty-boat.

The circular also showed pictures of four of the men who were ex-convicts.

For the next two days Gordon scarcely ate or slept, but divided his time between eagerly scanning all the floating craft which they passed or which passed them, and studying the pictures of the robbers, so as to have their features firmly impressed upon his mind in case they should fall in with any suspicious characters.



## CHAPTER XXVII

### DOWN THE MISSISSIPPI

AT last one day the *Westward Ho* passed a little settlement of several houses on the Missouri shore, but could not approach it on account of the marsh-land between the river and the levee. They regretted this because Gordon's vaunted knowledge of the locality of Jack Holden's home had suffered some embarrassment in the last day or two and they had hoped to make inquiries.

It must be confessed that Gordon's anxiety to revisit the hospitable Holden cottage, though still keen, had experienced a temporary eclipse in his wish to apprehend the band of train-robbers. Nor was it the five hundred dollars' reward that he cared about. Not he. It was the glory of overtaking a fleeing criminal and bringing him to justice. He had even forgotten La Salle in his new rôle of sleuth.

"There's one thing sure," he said; "they can't take their boat off the river."

"They might forsake it," ventured Dr. Brent.

"Cracky, I hope we can find them!" said Gor-



don. "If they were just plain ordinary burglars, that wouldn't be so good —"

"No, it would be very bad," said Brick Parks.

"But train-robbers!" said Gordon, ignoring him.

"You don't run across train-robbers every day!"

"Thank goodness for that!" said the doctor.

"It looks as if we're not going to run across them *any* day," added Til Morrell.

"What's the idea if we do find them?" asked Roy Carpenter. "Get them to join the Scouts?"

"You make me tired!" said Gordon.

"We couldn't exactly arrest them, could —"

"We could *shadow* them, couldn't we?" Gordon shouted in high disgust. "Do you mean to tell me that catching (anyway, you ought to say *apprehending* — that shows how much *you* know about such things!) — Do you mean to tell me that apprehending is as good as shadowing? Aren't you always supposed to shadow for a long time before you ca—apprehend? Sure you are! Did you ever read *The Black Ranger*? Well, he was shadowed for years —"

"About how far should we shadow them?" asked Dr. Brent.

"As far as Helena or Vicksburg — or some place. And we'd have to make sure they were the robbers. Then we'd hand them over."

Dr. Brent pursed his lips. "Hmmm," said he; "much as I should like to shadow a band of train-



robbers, I believe the best thing for us to do will be to stop at the home of your soldier friend when we get there. I have no doubt the authorities down below have been apprised of these ruffians —”

“They aren’t *ruffians*,” Gordon interrupted defensively.

“You could hardly call them gentlemen —”

“No, but they’re not just plain ruffians,” insisted Gordon; “they’re train-robbers!”

“I’ll try not to insult them again,” said Dr. Brent. “I suppose it’s permissible to call them scoundrels?”

“You can’t call them Sunday School teachers,” said Brick.

“How about outlaws?” suggested Roy.

“Outlaws is all right,” said Gordon, “or — or — highwaymen; but outlaws is better, I guess.”

“I’m afraid,” said Dr. Brent ruefully, “that our fleeing outlaws are well past your friend’s home by this time. I think it would be imprudent to pursue our quest — er — that is, our shadowing — further; notwithstanding the good example of those who trailed the *Black Ranger*. We must not go too far south if we wish to be in the neighborhood of St. Louis when Harry comes marching in from Montana.”

This argument was effectual with Gordon, as the doctor knew it would be. For a moment he stood, as it were, irresolute between two loves, Harry to



the north and the train-robbers to the south; and his anxiety to run no chance of missing his friend triumphed.

But all through the following day he kept an eye out for any boat which might belong to the fugitives, and as the *Westward Ho* approached the bend which was familiar to him, his elation at the proximity to Jack's home was considerably modified by the thought of abandoning his quest of the train-robbers.

But soon other matters engrossed his thoughts. If you are a scout, you must know that it is a scout's habit to scrutinize localities, to remember landmarks, and to bear in mind all he sees. If he be a good scout (and Gordon was all of that with a considerable surplus) he will practice this habit until it becomes second nature, and a neighborhood once passed, a tree once seen, a river once crossed, a hill once climbed, is registered in the scout mind as familiar territory. A scout is so far from being frightened out of his seven senses that they are usually his obedient slaves. Then, too, certain incidents had fixed this particular locality indelibly in Gordon's mind.

Hence when the *Westward Ho* came along that stretch of river just above the sharp, upper bend, Gordon saw something which he had not noticed on his former memorable trip, and the Howell boys, who had been of the party then, were equally surprised.



It is probable that if these boys had not been scouts they would have passed along without noticing the channel across the marsh, for to an unpracticed eye such things are much more discernible on a map than on a wide expanse of actual territory, where size and distance are apt to embarrass one's vision, and only one detail can be seen at once. But the scout is accustomed to look large, as one might say; and sailing down the Kentucky side of the river, the three who had once before passed here were rather astonished to notice that most of the water took a sharp cut through a straight but wide and ragged channel directly southward. Along the reach which formed the old bend to the west the water still flowed, but was so low that the ragged, eroded, perpendicular banks were visible, with muskrat holes plain to view all along. It looked like the river at home at low tide.

As they had no power against the current, they could not proceed along the reduced river by the old route with any hope of returning in case the way were not clear, and it became a question what to do.

"I have an idea," said Gordon, "that this is just a short-cut across the bend."

Dr. Brent nodded. "Very likely," said he, "if you're sure the river bends east again. I should say that is just what has happened; she's cut her



trail. This way seems to be perfectly safe and no doubt it's shorter."

They were, in fact, at the head or inlet of the new channel which Wesley Binford had suggested making. It was not recognizable as artificial and formed now more of a lake than a channel, as the spreading river flowed apparently unrestricted through the area of marshland. No excavation of any kind could be seen. Yet it is true that there in that spongy lowland, a few picks and shovels, guided and directed by one boy's brain, had beckoned the mighty river out of her path of destruction and she had followed as a monstrous elephant follows its tiny, insignificant keeper.

It was dusk when they floated into this open way and they soon saw hills looming in the gathering darkness directly before them.

"Guess we're in a blind alley after all," said the doctor.

"Don't be too sure of it," said Will Howell, "it may be the Missouri shore of the regular channel. If we come into the old river channel at right angles the opposite shore would seem to cross our path — wouldn't it?"

"Listen to the high-brow!" said his brother.

"Whatever it is," said the doctor, "we shall have to go ahead, for the very good and sufficient reason that we can't do anything else."

So they went ahead and presently passing the



end of a line of hills, they found that the river crossed their path indeed with a group of hills directly opposite.

"This old river came pretty near to knowing where to make the jump, didn't she?" said Joe Howell.

"Who's the high-brow now?" asked his brother. "I don't quite get you, Brother William. I'm from Missouri; please show me."

"It seems to me," said the doctor, laughing, "that the river herself is the high-brow. She cut across just where that group of hills would stop her when she hit into the old channel. Otherwise she'd have jumped her bank over yonder and maybe flooded the country below."

But the doctor was mistaken. It was no credit to the old river that the hills deflected her and that she flowed still around the old lower bend. It was no credit to the heedless river that the little Holden cottage, just below, still nestled along her shore. It was no credit to the treacherous river that the village of Whitville stood where it had always stood, with nothing but a few flooded cellars to be pumped out. The old river is no "high-brow." Indeed she seems, at times, but a great heartless brute, with death and misery and disaster to answer for.

The "high-brow" who was responsible for all this was at that very minute trudging through mud



and swamp in the darkness not a quarter of a mile away, limping as he made his way, soaked, dirty and exhausted, to the rest which he had not known in three days.



## CHAPTER XXVIII

### THE "TRAIN ROBBERS"

As the *Westward Ho* floated majestically into the old river channel, her company noticed a small light flickering across the waters. There was a strong cross-current here owing to the entry of this channel from the north, and our friends found it easy with the aid of their sweeps to guide the unruly *Westward Ho* across to the Missouri shore. Here the river, owing to this impetuous cross-current, had overflowed to the base of the hills, then turned southeast in perfect accordance with the programme arranged for her. But the party could not see this because of the darkness. They believed that having made a short cut across the upper bend, they were again in the old river, and as we know, they were correct in this supposition. They had no idea of what had taken place here, of the struggle between the "Old Lady" and human skill and knowledge, but were content to amble on keeping a weather eye out for the lights which should indicate the Holden cottage.

They had crossed here in hope that the light they saw might be in Jack's home, particularly as



Gordon remembered the cottage to be at the foot of the hills.

But in this they were destined to disappointment. The light, as they presently saw, came from a shanty-boat and they were within twenty feet of it before they realized this.

"I think," said Dr. Brent, looking rather timidly at Gordon, "that this encounter is rather providential. It — it enables us to — the fact is I have a feeling of being lost. I know that we are on the water; I presume we are on the Mississippi; I am willing to believe that we are approaching the 'lower bend.' My faith is unbounded, but a vague fear haunts me that we may unwittingly have crossed the Gulf of Mexico, that the channel we came through is one arm of the delta, that the cluster of houses we passed this afternoon was a suburb of New Orleans — and that — that —"

"That it would be just too provoking for anything if we woke up and found ourselves in the English Channel," finished Parks.

"It would," agreed the doctor.

"Well?" said Gordon, ominously.

"I am aware that scouts scorn to ask a direction," said the doctor, feeling his way cautiously. "Yet it is a fact that no less a scout than William F. Cody asked a New York policeman to direct him to East Twenty-seventh Street."

"What?" exclaimed Gordon.



"It is a fact," triumphed the doctor, "and General Sir Baden-Powell and Ernest Thompson-Seton<sup>1</sup> were —"

"Lost in Central Park," put in Brick Parks.

Gordon stared incredulously.

"The Scout organization tried to keep it quiet," said Roy innocently, "but such things always leak out."

"Is it true," asked Will Howell, "that they tried to find their way out by getting on the merry-go-round?"

"Go on!" said Gordon. "You make me tired!"

"Moreover," said the doctor, soothingly; "it is not scoutish to run a chance of circumnavigating the globe simply because we are too proud to inquire where we are at. The soft curtain of night has got me somewhat rattled."

"A scout doesn't inquire where he is at," said Gordon.

"He does if he doesn't know," urged the doctor. "When you don't know, the next best thing is to know that you don't know."

"We're not on Twenty-seventh Street," said Gordon, contemptuously.

"I wish we were," said the doctor.

"We could take a Broadway car and transfer at Twenty-third," said Til Morrell.

<sup>1</sup> Chief Scout.



Gordon looked at him in utter disgust. "Don't talk about transferring," he shouted. "Is that the way a scout talks? Do you mean to tell me you'd *ride* four blocks?"

The doctor winked meaningly at his assistant, Roy. "Besides," said he, "but no matter."

"What?" said Til.

"I was just going to say," said the doctor, "that perhaps, for all we know, that may be the very boat of the train-robbers. But no matter, we will laugh at the darkness and sail on, and on, and on — like Columbus in the poem."

There was a pause.

"I — I was just going to — A good scout always listens to advice," said Gordon.

"My advice," said the doctor, secretly triumphant, "is that we sail on."

"We — we'd better make sure where we're at," said Gordon.

"Very well," said Dr. Brent, repressing a smile. "I wish it recorded in the *Westward Ho's* log book by the troop historian that the scoutmaster was for proceeding down the river; was for *finding a way*, to use a phrase which one of our number has made familiar; and that G. Lord, of the Beaver Patrol, insisted on inquiring of strangers where we were at."

It was the mention of the train-robbers that induced Gordon to so much as approach this strange



neighboring boat, and Dr. Brent believed that he had handled the young Beaver with such diplomatic skill that he would presently return with information as to where they were. He had himself no suspicion of robbers, and he was presently to experience one of the greatest surprises of his interesting and varied career as scoutmaster. Yet he might have known that surprises and adventures ever lurked in the path of G. Lord, and that the mere wink of an eye, where that redoubtable youngster was concerned, might have startling developments.

It was agreed that Gordon and Roy should land and follow along the shore to a point where the other boat lay, almost entirely concealed by the darkness, save for its small light. After satisfying themselves that its occupants were not the fugitives, they were to descend to the less romantic business of making inquiries.

On approaching the strange boat they found it to be rather stranger than the general run of Mississippi craft, but Gordon was too much a veteran in Mississippi travel to be surprised at any craft, however freakish, and his curiosity centered on the light which emanated from its window. He preferred to believe that he was on the track of the miscreants, and he induced Roy to approach the window surreptitiously instead of knocking at the door.



"Shh," said he, as they tiptoed across the platform deck. "They may be dividing their booty — sh-h-h-h."

Roy stepped on a loose plank which made a sound like a thunderbolt in the tense stillness, causing Gordon to emit another warning, "Sh-h-h-h."

Cautiously they approached the window and looked in. The small room, or cabin, was in great disorder, but no human being was to be seen. On a rough kitchen chair lay a raveled and dirty sweater; a peaked cap was on the floor; on a pair of boards which evidently did service for a table was a pistol, a jimie and a small black mask. On the floor was a large metal box. Near it on a rough bench lay a dark lantern and a pair of pistols in a leather case. Clothing of every variety and in every stage of wear was strewn about the place. A small crowbar stood in one corner and its appalling significance was heightened by a black mask on the top of it.

The sight of this ominous paraphernalia held the boys silent and their first move was to glance furtively shoreward to see if any one was near. Then Gordon spoke, in a fearful and awestruck whisper.

"That crowbar is to pry up railroad tracks."

"Look at all the clothes," whispered Roy; "they must have robbed a train at night and taken all the passengers' clothing while they were in their berths."



"Cracky!" breathed Gordon. "Let's get out of here before any one comes! Didn't I say it might be the robbers?"

"No," whispered Roy, as they tiptoed fearfully ashore; "Dr. Brent did."

"*He* wanted to sail on!" said Gordon. "There's five hundred dollars' reward coming to us! Suppose we'd been caught there!"

"Catch me making any inquiries in that den," said Roy, a trifle relieved to be ashore.

His relief was but momentary, for at that very minute Gordon clasped his arm in terror and whispered, "Look — look — coming down that path! Shall we run?"

Several figures silhouetted against the horizon were coming down single file, and silent, toward the boat. There was no chance to run, whatever they might have chosen to do and moreover it is the scout habit to observe, to learn all there is to learn. A scout knows also how to move silently, and as the sinister procession approached, the boys lowered themselves amid the tall swamp grass and waited.

"Can you see their faces?" Roy whispered.

"Sh-h-h," said Gordon. "No, their hats are all pulled down. Don't move — they're going right past!"

"Gee, but they're a tough-looking crowd," breathed Roy.



Then suddenly, the face of the last one, as he stepped aboard and into the faint light from the cabin lamp, became visible, and Gordon could hardly credit his eyes for what he beheld.

"Did you see him, Roy?" he whispered breathlessly. "Cracky, it's terrible! Look! Do you see him — the last one?"

"Yes, I saw him," gasped Roy. "Gee, but he looked awful! Don't talk. Creep along — and let's get back!"

They crawled a short distance under the swamp grass, then rose and ran pell-mell for their own boat, both experiencing a great sense of relief when they reached it. Gordon stumbled against Dr. Brent and in his agitation held him for a second, frantically.

"It is — it is!" he cried. "It's the robbers — we saw inside their boat — there's dark lanterns — and jimmies — and — and all sorts of things they stole — and pistols — and they nearly caught us as they came down — and we saw the last one — doctor — and it's — it's *Wesley Binford*! And he looks *awful*, doctor! He's alive, just as Harry said he was — and he's — he's gone from bad to worse!"



## CHAPTER XXIX

### GORDON DECIDES NOT TO CLAIM THE REWARD

IN the troop Gordon had somewhat the reputation of an alarmist, and many good stories were told at his expense. His sense of observation was so acute and his love of adventure so keen that he frequently accommodated the one to the other, with the result that the most matter-of-fact occurrences became fraught with the most romantic significance. If he saw a man digging a hole for a telegraph-pole, it was easy to imagine him secreting buried treasure. But he was nothing if not truthful, and his breathless report to Dr. Brent caused the scout-master to look sober and thoughtful.

The possibility of really finding the robbers had been more or less a joke with the doctor on their trip down the river, but what could he say now? There was no discrepancy between what Roy and Gordon said, and respectable persons do not travel with pistols and jimmies and dark lanterns and masks. These indubitable signs of criminality left but one theory plausible. They must actually have stumbled upon the band of ruffians escaping from the north. The discovery of Wesley Binford



among them clouded whatever gratification the boys felt, however, and made them sick at heart.

“What shall we do?” said Til Morrell.

“Stay here till they move on,” said the doctor; “then move on ourselves. We can’t overpower and arrest them. We had better put out our light and lie low. Let us moderate our voices. At the first village I will notify the authorities or wire to St. Louis — also to Memphis and Helena.”

“And Wesley?” Roy asked.

The doctor shook his head soberly. “I don’t know,” said he; “if he is implicated — I don’t know,” he broke off, “whether there would be any use in my seeing him. Reform isn’t likely beyond a certain point. I hardly know what to do or say. We will try to follow them and let developments determine our course. Have they power on their boat?”

“A little dinky kicker,” said Roy. “They ought to be arrested for cruelty to engines.”

In a sense Wesley Binford spoiled it all, for the adventurous pleasure of trailing fugitives was entirely negatived by the knowledge of his presence among them. A certain atmosphere of soberness pervaded the party and even Gordon’s volubility was stilled by his proximity to crime and to a criminal — yes, a *criminal* — whom he had actually known away home in Oakwood.

He thought of that day when he had stood with



the other boys by the river and Harry had dived for Wesley's body. What would Harry say to this?

"I don't want to see him, doctor," he said frankly. "I—I don't mean because I wouldn't speak to him or anything like that, but it would kind of make me think of how he used to be—in Oakwood—when I used to see him going down Main Street.—He used to take my hat off and hand it to me as he went by—and it always made me mad!—But I wish it was the same now and he was doing it just as he did."

If Gordon had given a lecture on Wesley it could not have recalled him more vividly to the other boys. It always made the small boys mad when Wesley did that, yet he would often follow it up by putting his arm over the victim's shoulder and walking with him a ways, quite in a manly fashion; and the small boy invariably felt flattered at his attention.

"Once he bought me a soda," said Gordon.

"He was a queer boy," ruminated the doctor, sadly. "Sometimes I think no one understood him—ever really got to him—not even his own father. Possibly his mother did—his own mother. I think Harry got as near to him as any one. A little start in the right direction and he might have done wonders. I sometimes fancied he had an unusual brain, if one could only get at it."



As if by common consent they abandoned the subject, yet the knowledge of Wesley's proximity in such company cast a certain gloom over the party.

After half an hour or so the light moved and the *Westward Ho's* company saw their lumbering neighbor moving, a half tangible bulk through the darkness. A sharp, unmuffled chugging told that they were starting downstream. This and their moving light, its feeble ray glinting the water slightly, were the only evidences that they were preceded by another craft.

After a while the light suddenly disappeared. Fifteen minutes later, the *Westward Ho* discovered the strange craft moored in a little cove. Not more than a hundred feet distant was a house. No light was to be seen within it but its outline was clear. The *Westward Ho* extinguished her light and made shore quietly a safe distance below.

"They may have just tied up for the night to sleep," said Brick Parks.

"It's rather odd," said the doctor, "that such a crowd as that should tie up so close to a house."

"What are we going to do?" Roy asked.

"I think we will do a little scouting," Dr. Brent answered; "if they have tied up to sleep, well and good. We can drift on down to the next village and notify the authorities there. If they are up to any mischief it would be well to know it. Til, suppose you make a sort of reconnoissance over there."



Tilford Morrell held the stalker's badge in the troop. Brick Parks said of him that he could approach a deer and the deer would never be any the wiser until he pulled its tail. Be this as it might, he had various scout "stunts" to his credit, and it is a matter of troop record that when they were camping in the Adirondacks he took down the Beavers' tent from over their very heads while they lay asleep, and they found it rolled up in the Hawks' shelter in the morning. Twigs never crackled under Tilford's feet; doors never creaked when he opened them; the whole world, both indoors and out, seemed to be carpeted with India rubber. Part way up the wide, uncarpeted staircase of Harry Arnold's home, was a step which signaled the approach of any ascending form. But Tilford could place both feet on it and it would remain silent. His every movement seemed to be muffled. He had cultivated stalking and shadowing to such a degree that there was something hardly less than uncanny in his comings and goings.

It was this boy, somewhat older than the rest, whom Dr. Brent selected to investigate their sinister neighbors.

Til had approached to within a few yards of the strange craft when he caught the sound of low voices and of the closing of a door. Instantly, he stepped behind a tree so dexterously and stealthily



that he seemed to have merged himself in it. Scarcely had he done so when six figures came ashore and started toward the house. He *thought* he heard one of them say, "all asleep by this time."

Til shadowed them at a safe distance until they reached the darkened house. Then they all moved out on the small lawn, looked up at the windows and seemed to consult together. Presently two went around behind the house and then one of them reappeared and beckoned to the others. Til advanced stealthily around the other side of the house just in time to see the first one enter through an open window.

This was quite enough, and he hastened back and reported what he had seen.

Dr. Brent's manner was determined. Apparently he had no difficulty in deciding upon his course. There was something about his prompt decisiveness which quite inspired the boys and increased their respect for him, if that were possible. He was the only man among them, yet he hesitated not a minute.

"What am I going to do?" he said tersely in answer to a question from Roy. "I don't know, but I am certainly not going to allow a gang of ruffians to rifle a house under my very eyes — not if I can prevent it!"

They saw he was in no mood for talking and



watched him in awed silence as he opened a duffel bag, removed a tin box and from it took a revolver.

"You're not going alone, doctor?" Roy asked.

"I'm not going to require any one to go with me—but those who wish to, may. Gordon and Howard had better remain behind."

But Gordon and Howard, who were the two youngest of the party, thought differently and concluded that *tagging* behind was just as good as *remaining* behind.

"Those of you who wish to come along bring your rifles. Tilford, you take this extra revolver; stay close by me, and do exactly as I tell you, neither less nor more. See if you know the scout rule of precise obedience. All of you depend entirely upon my judgment and don't get rattled. You understand that, all of you? This will put some of your training to the test," he added grimly.

They were not afraid, for courage is a quality of all scouts and they had implicit faith in their scoutmaster, whose own demeanor inspired them all. But there was a tenseness among them which precluded conversation as they went along.

"Suppose," whispered Gordon to Howard Brent, "suppose *he* should be shot down."

He meant Wesley, but Howard thought he meant the scoutmaster. I dare say more than one of them was affected by the consciousness that they were approaching, armed, to one who had been their own schoolmate.



Reaching the house, they saw a light behind the lowered shades of what they thought was the kitchen. The doctor quietly disposed his little band in such a way that every one would have an advantage save himself. Roy and Brick Parks were stationed in the shadow outside the back door. A scout was placed at each window with instructions to break it if he heard a certain call from within, to aim carefully and fire.

"I believe," the doctor said, "that the first thing they would do on entering through a window would be to unlatch the doors from within so as to have an easy get-away. It may enable us to take them unawares. Tilford, you come with me, stay directly behind me and do nothing which I do not tell you to do."

The boys could hardly gulp down their nervousness and conquer the darkest apprehensions as they saw their beloved and intrepid scoutmaster place his hand softly on the front door knob. He held two pistols and Tilford held one. They paused for a moment, the doctor's hand still on the knob, then the door opened and they stepped silently within.

They found themselves in a little hall, with a door leading from it to a small sitting-room, beyond which was a lighted room whence came low voices.

The doctor walked silently through the sitting-room, stooped, peered through the keyhole, then to



Tilford's utter astonishment straightened up and with entire disregard of scoutish precautions, observed, "*This is a most extraordinary thing!*"

With this he opened the door and stepped in, and Tilford's eyes, as he followed him, stared with a blank and bewildered stare which no band of robbers could possibly have inspired.

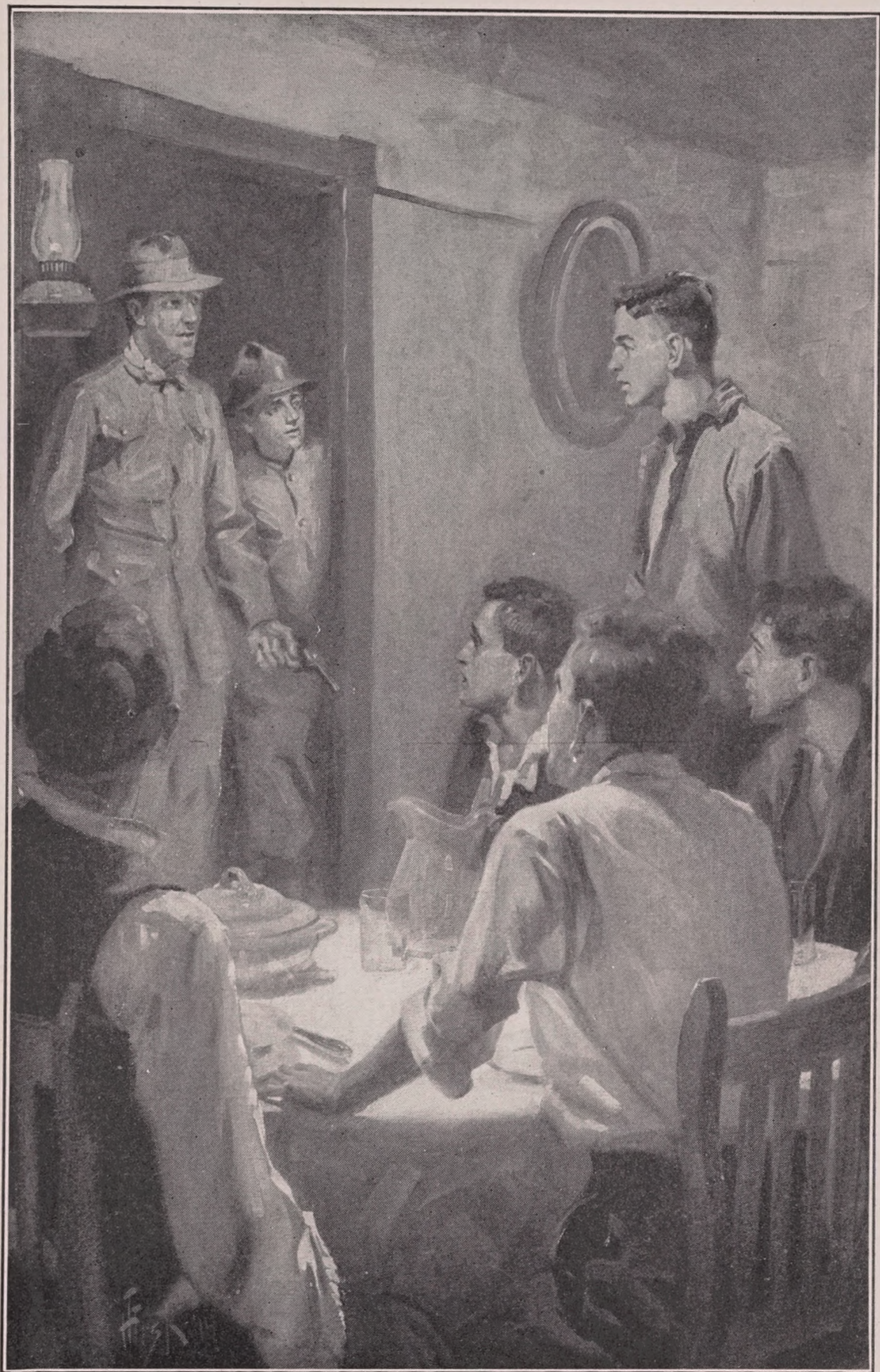
At the head of a dining-table sat a man whom neither the doctor nor Til knew. He was carving a cold ham, and at their entrance he glanced complacently at them and observed in a matter-of-fact way, "How'd do — nice evening."

To his right sat Harry Arnold, weary-looking and dirty; next to him sat Wesley Binford, and filling the rest of the table three young men whom the doctor and Tilford did not know. The entire party looked as if they had wallowed in mud for several days.

"Well — what — in — the — name — of —" Harry gasped, then paused, gaping and speechless. "Red Deer! Til!" he presently shouted, jumping up. "Punch me, Wes, to see if I'm asleep! Where in the name of — Where did you come from? And pistols! What are you going to do with the pistols?"

It seemed fully a minute before Dr. Brent could get possession of himself sufficiently to answer. Even then he spoke in a sort of daze. "I am — I'm going to — put them — in my pocket. Harry,





"IT SEEMED FULLY A MINUTE BEFORE DR. BRENT COULD GET POSSESSION OF HIMSELF SUFFICIENTLY TO ANSWER."







if it is indeed you — I find myself unequal to this occasion. We — the fact is — er — How do you do, Wesley, my boy? The fact is we've been shadowing you. We thought you were robbers. The boys are outside, Harry."

"And what in goodness are you doing out here anyway? Trying to give people heart failure? Til, you old tramp, how'd you get here, anyway? I've had some surprises in the last year, but this *is* the limit!"

"We are on our vacation," explained the doctor, weakly; "we are traveling and camping at the same time. Gordon is with us —"

"Good!" said Mr. Conne.

"And we're hunting for the home of that soldier fellow you and he met in Panama," went on the doctor.

"Well, here he is, right here," laughed Jack; "and mighty glad to see you, too; the more the merrier."

Mr. Conne had risen and sauntering to the front door, called in his funny, matter-of-fact way, "Don't you boys want to come in and have a bite of cold ham?"

One by one, and cautiously, they entered, gaping like so many idiots, and when Mr. Conne returned he had his arm over Gordon's shoulder. He seemed to have taken possession of him for his own particular amusement, just as he had done in Panama.



“Regular meeting of the clans, hey, Harry?” said he. “Well, Gordon, old boy, what are you going to do with the robbers now you’ve caught them? Here we are, all hands around St. Paul’s, whatever that means, and the supper standing idle.”

The charm of his personality seemed to have made him host, here in the little Holden home, just as he had been the central spirit on Mr. Howell’s yacht at Panama.

The cry which rose from Gordon when he saw Harry, to say nothing of the Conne party and Wesley and Jack, brought downstairs Jack’s mother and sister, and it was soon explained why the returning workers had made their entry surreptitiously into the house.

“This has been a terrible three days for all of us,” said Jack, “and my mother and sister have felt it too. They’ve been up every morning at daylight getting us breakfast and all day yesterday and the day before, squads of the men have been eating here. So we tried to come in and get ourselves a little supper to-night without waking them. That’s why we came in in back. Thank goodness, we’re through now! It’s been a tough job!”

For a few minutes questions and explanations were flying as thick as bullets could possibly have flown if there had been, indeed, a deadly encounter. Bobby’s delight at seeing Gordon was only second to Mr. Conne’s amusement and satisfaction at fall-



ing in with him again, and Gordon's generous enthusiasm at finding Wesley the acknowledged hero of the occasion was only rivaled by his joy at this premature and romantic meeting with Harry. In short everybody was amazed at meeting everybody else, and overjoyed into the bargain. When the excitement was all over, one or two reflected that there had been no introductions at all, but they did not spoil the occasion by resource to that formal proceeding. It was Jack's young sister who protested against it, saying that "if everybody didn't know everybody else by this time, they never would."

"Correct," said Mr. Conne, to the laughing girl; "step up to the head of the class."

"And there's one thing," said Gordon, shouting as if to clear a way for himself by his very voice; "there's one thing—even La Salle didn't strike anything as good as this! He may have had adventures —"

"You'll see them all on Excelsior Films," said Mr. Conne.

"—and fought Indians and had intrigues against him, and caught the fever miles away from where the—what do you call it?—where the foot of white man —"

"Sure," said Brick Parks.

"—and been killed and all that —"

"This is better than being killed," put in Til.



"Sure it is!" vociferated Gordon. "We've got La Salle beaten to a — something or other!"

"That's what we have," said Mr. Conne, "and I wouldn't be at all surprised," he added, drawing Gordon toward him; "I wouldn't be at all surprised if we have adventures enough yet to make Lewis and Clarke look like a pair of clothespoles in a back yard."

Amid all the laughter and talk, Bobby missed Wesley and found him alone on the little vine-covered porch. The boy who had "gone from bad to worse" was leaning against a post and looking out upon the great river. Was it that it embarrassed him to be among those familiar Oakwood faces? Or was it just that the river fascinated him and that he liked to watch it flowing here past the simple home of these good people where it had always flowed? I do not know; he was a strange boy.



## CHAPTER XXX

### PLANS AND FAREWELLS

*"O-o-o-o-h, won't it be great!"*

"Gigantic," said Mr. Conne. "It will make the capitol at Washington look like a homeopathic pill."

They had been talking of the proposed trip into Mexico and Gordon's exclamation was uttered after a period of spellbound silence while he listened to Mr. Conne's plan.

"Talk about adventures!" He felt that here was balm and recompense for what he had missed.

"Of course," said Mr. Conne, "I cannot promise that we will be killed — you mustn't expect too much; but as we're going where Spaniards are, I think I can assure you that we'll be robbed. Perhaps if we're good, we may even be thrown into jail — but you mustn't count on it."

"That'll be going some," said Harry.

"Oh, won't it be luscious!" cried Gordon.

"I don't want you to build your hopes too high," said Mr. Conne. "But between you and me I shouldn't be at all surprised if we were held as hostages."

*"Real hostages?"* shouted Gordon.



"Warranted genuine," said Mr. Conne.

"Oh, cracky!" Gordon felt that life could hold no greater bliss than to be "held as a hostage."

"Then it is settled we all go?" said Mr. Conne.

"Apparently it is settled," observed Dr. Brent, resignedly; "it's as the troop ordains."

"Three cheers for Red Deer!" shouted Roy.

"We appear," said the doctor, "to be already held, by er — stronger fetters than any we shall find in Mexico. It seems useless to resist."

"Hurrah for Mr. Carleton Conne!" shouted Til Morrell.

"Down with Huerta!" cried Howard Brent.

"Three cheers for Excelsior Films!"

"Who says Mr. Conne's middle name isn't Action?"

"Who says Red Deer isn't a pippin?"

The doctor removed his gold specs modestly, smiled a little and immediately replaced them.

"Do you deny that you're a pippin, doctor?" demanded Mr. Conne.

"I am — er — willing to allow it to be — er — inferred that I am."

"Why are Excelsior Films like the Reclamation Service?" called Pierce (Beaver), literally jumping with delight.

"Because they take you back to Nature!" Gordon shouted. "There! You thought I couldn't guess it — y-a-a-a-h!"



Amid all this uproar, there rose the clear voice of a girl, "I wish I was a boy."

Jack looked up at his sister and Mrs. Holden said, "Did you ever hear of such a thing!"

"That's where you're wrong, Martha," shouted Gordon; "there have to be girls for soldiers to say good-b—I mean, farewell—to. By rights, you ought to give us some kind of trinkets—remembrances—and tell us to look at them if we're wounded."

"'Twould take about two gross of trinkets," said Mr. Conne.

"Well, anyway," said Gordon, "there's a vine-covered porch to say good-by on—that's one thing."

"Yes, but I wish I was going," said Martha.

"You're supposed to stay here and pine away," comforted Gordon; "see?"

"All right, I'll try to," said the girl, laughing at Gordon, in spite of herself.

"Did you ever see such a boy?" Mrs. Holden laughed.

"Good as a hot cruller, isn't he?" said Mr. Conne.

"There have to be sisters and sweethearts and things," said Gordon, with great finality; "else what's the use of wars at all? There have to be gray-haired mothers, too."

"Did you ever?" said Mrs. Holden.



“Well, then,” said Mr. Conne; “if it’s all settled that we all march under the banner with the strange device, Excelsior, I propose the dissolution of the Busy Beavers Amalgamated, Consolidated, Westward-Ho Syndicate, all unpaid dividends to be used in the purchase of picture postcards and hot tamales — which I understand to be the national delicacy of Mexico. I submit to the directors of the institution that the *Westward Ho’s* deck be left here as a private mooring-float, and that the superstructure, or one-time freight car, be formally presented to Mrs. Holden in remembrance of her kindly hospitality, to be used as a chicken-coop. The Westward Hos then to combine with the Slow Pokes under the name of the LONG GULCH LEWIS AND CLARKE AND WESTWARD-HO AMALGAMATED SLOWPOKE CONSOLIDATED AND EXCELSIOR SYNDICATE — absolutely unlimited.

“Since our object will be to obtain films to *show* people, we will be incorporated under the laws of Missouri. G. Lord, president and mascot; W. Binford, chief engineer; H. Arnold, private detective and cache-hunter; Robertus Cullen, orchestra; Honorable Red Deer Brent, M.D., robber-chaser and champion with pistols — guaranteed to put a pistol back in his pocket quicker than any scoutmaster in America. The five hundred dollars’ reward which Mr. G. Lord will not receive to be devoted to pur-



chasing a popgun for Dr. Brent and a pail and shovel to be presented to Brother Arnold to assist him in his antiquarian researches and treasure quests.

"All in favor of this will please help themselves to another biscuit," he concluded, as Mrs. Holden, laughing, placed a laden platter on the table.

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remnant of the *Westward Ho* preserves some measure of its former glory; and often in the early morn some boastful rooster will perch upon its leaky roof and peal forth his discordant note, as if to remind the world that his obscure and unpretentious home, like the Old South Church and Independence Hall, has a proud and glorious history!

THE END



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